

‘It’s more than a game’: Young women’s experiences with physical activity as a means for  
resilience throughout adolescence

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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored how physical activity is experienced as a means for resilience as well as the defining characteristics and meaning of that experience. Four participants were interviewed, aged 18 to 21 years; all of which were receiving a university education at the time of the interviews. Physical activity has been connected to various physical, intellectual, psychological, and social benefits during adolescence. The participants in this study described their journeys to achieving wellness despite growing up with adversities collectively deemed as adverse.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was the methodology utilized to investigate the data generated through several semi-structured in depth interviews with the participants. The analyzed data formed the overarching theme of *self development in the face of adversity*, which was evident throughout the three superordinate themes: *channeling energy*, *nurturing relationships*, and *challenging the self*. The participants explained their passages through adolescence amidst adversities to be ones full of ups and downs, but ultimately progress towards their current accomplishments, goals, dreams, and personal growth. The themes are discussed within the context of the current literature and then followed by recommendations for future research, considerations for professionals, and a conclusion including words of wisdom from the participants.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my partner Mr. Anthony Troesch. Thank you for your unconditional love and support throughout the intense learning process involved in writing a thesis. You were my rock. Secondly, this thesis would not have been written with the same passion if my coaches, Cory Niefer and Rick Petrucha, were not such profound influences in my life. Thank you for teaching me about sport and life. I admire both of your enthusiasms for athletics, competences as coaches, and abilities to connect to your athletes with both love and professionalism. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my family for encouraging me to pursue my dreams and goals with confidence and zest. Also, I am so grateful that you provided me the means to be active in adolescence. I can honestly say that I would have not been able to accomplish all that I have without the unconditional love, support, and guidance I received from all of you.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*"It's a shame for a woman to grow old without ever seeing the strength and beauty of which the body is capable." - Socrates*

The current research study was inspired by many local initiatives in Saskatchewan, Canada, where physical activity is being promoted in youth and adults for its wide range of physical and mental health benefits. Specifically, an initiative developed by Saskatchewan Sport called: 'SPORT. It's More Than A Game' (SIMTAG), inspired the title of this research proposal. This is an advocacy campaign that promotes the wide benefits of amateur sports through advertising at public locations throughout Saskatchewan (Sask Sport Inc., 2007). The importance of physical activity is being recognized and extensively promoted throughout Saskatchewan in campaigns such as SIMTAG. The intent of the current research study was to add to the body of research discussing the benefits of physical activity, with a specific focus on how it builds resilience in adolescent females. In the following sections, the rationale, purpose, research definitions, questions, and significance of the current research study will be presented.

### 1.1 Rationale

Adolescence is the period of time between childhood and adulthood; this is a period characterized by substantial learning and growth (Lerner, Brown, & Kier, 2005; Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). As adolescents encounter challenges in life, it is important that they have support and skills to persevere and continue to develop positively through difficult times (Kia-Keating, Dowdy, & Morgan, 2011). The meaning that physical activity holds for individuals as they reflect on adolescence may have significant value (Darbyshire, Macdougall, & Schiller, 2005). Males and females have different life challenges during adolescence (Government of Canada, 2006) and different experiences with physical activity (Zimmerman & Reavilm, 1998).

Physical activity encompasses any motion an individual goes through where they expend energy (Caspersen, Powell, & Christenson, 1985), including organized sport, dance, and exercise. Research has shown that adolescent females are not as likely to participate in sports or physical activity to the same extent as their male counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2005). Research that seeks to understand young women's experiences with physical activity and corresponding attitudes towards their involvement or non-involvement could provide insight into why this gender gap exists.

The meaning of physical activity in the perspectives of adolescent females is eclectic and serves more purposes than purely physical fitness and health (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). For example, physical activity has been interpreted as a strategy for individual expression and space, a means for enhancing emotional well-being, or as an outlet for enjoyable engagement with peers (Brooks & Magnusson, 2007). Physical activity may not be easily accessible for adolescent females due to the unique barriers relevant to this population (Slater & Tiggemann, 2011; Dwyer, Allison, Goldenberg, Fein, Yoshida, & Boutilier, 2006). This is worrisome because adolescent females are at a disadvantage in terms of receiving the wide range of benefits physical activity offers. The perspectives gained from the current study are important to consider when planning physical activity initiatives that accommodate the needs of adolescent females.

It has been suggested that physical activity can promote positive development and resilience in youth (Collingwood, 1997; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2007; Petitpas, Cornelius, Raalte, & Jones, 2005; Martinek & Hellison, 1997). Positive youth development encompasses the wide range of developmental processes adolescents encounter in physical, social, psychological/emotional, and intellectual domains (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004). Resilience is commonly understood as process encompassing positive adaptation within the

context of significant adversity (Luthar, Cichetti, & Becker, 2000). Many adolescents, especially females, remain inactive despite the numerous benefits that physical activity offers (Statistics Canada, 2005). This problematic because adolescent females are not receiving the assets and resources available that could assist them in developing to their full potentials.

## 1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how physical activity is experienced as a means for resilience and to reveal the defining characteristics and meaning of that experience. The role of physical activity was considered in relation to resilience from the perspectives of four young women reflecting on their adolescence. The main research problem was to determine how physical activity was experienced as an avenue for developing resilience in adolescent females. Understanding the lived experiences of young women who believe physical activity has helped them develop resilience through adolescence will provide parents, teachers, counsellors, and other professionals with knowledge to empathize with this population and develop interventions that meet their needs. In addition, youth may relate to these lived experiences and feel inspired to be more active. Conclusions developed through this research will be used to provide information about how physical activity may be included in programming or promoted as a way to help female adolescents build resilience. Bringing light to young women's perceptions of physical activity and resilience contributed to the research regarding strength-based and preventative approaches for helping female adolescents who may be at risk for negative life outcomes.

## 1.3 Definitions

There are some pertinent terms that will be used consistently throughout this study and it is important to clarify their meanings. The following list of definitions is provided to help understand the research population and the constructs to be explored.

**Adolescence:** Period of transition across the second decade of life where biological, psychological, and social characteristics undergo change in an interrelated manner as a person becomes adultlike (Lerner, Brown, & Kier, 2005).

**Adversity:** Uncontrollable life circumstances that individuals perceive as significantly difficult.

**At Risk Youth:** Individuals who face adverse circumstances that increase the likelihood of developing problems that may limit their success in life (Smith, Polloway, Patton, Carol, McIntyre, & Francis, 2009).

**Physical Activity:** Broad concept that involves movement of the body resulting in energy expenditure (Caspersen, Powell, & Christenson, 1985). For the purposes of the current study, physical activity will be limited to forms of sports or exercise.

**Positive Youth Development:** A natural process in which it is believed that all youth have the potential to thrive and develop optimally (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004).

**Resilience:** The process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and ‘bouncing back’ in the face of adversity. Across the life course, the experience of resilience will vary (Windle, 2011).

**Young Women:** Females between the ages of 18 and 25 (research participants in the current study).

**Sport:** An activity is a sport when it includes gross physical skills, competition, and institutional aspects such as rules, history, and a wide geographical base (Drewe, 2003).

#### 1.4 Research Questions

In order to understand the phenomenon of physical activity and resilience, the central research question was: what is the role of physical activity in young women's experiences of

resilience in adolescence? This research question was based on the belief that individuals have unique perspectives on phenomenon and that there is an essence to their experiences that is shared with others. Although the results of the current study will not be generalizable to *all* adolescent females, nor is generalizability the goal, the perspectives of the research participants are still valuable. They have enhanced understandings of how physical activity impacts resilience. Other important research questions include:

- 1) What does resilience mean to young women? How did they navigate and negotiate the adversity they experienced in adolescence?
- 2) What was the meaning of physical activity in adolescence for young women? How was physical activity experienced? What is the accessibility to physical activity like for adolescent females and how could it be improved?
- 3) How does physical activity contribute to positive youth development in adolescent females? What aspects of physical activity contribute to building resilience in adolescent females?

### 1.5 The Researcher

*Throughout my experiences as a coach, teacher, and high performance athlete, I have seen the value of physical activity personally and in the lives of adolescents. Participating in physical activity provided me the opportunity to practice a variety of life skills including: working as a team, setting goals, and taking responsibility for my actions. My role as an athlete was a significant part of my identity as an adolescent. Physical activity was a huge part of my life and taught me many things that are now easier to understand from my viewpoint as an adult. It taught me how to take different perspectives on situations and learn from my mistakes. I learned how to reflect on my performances and change things in the future. Through physical activity, I*

*learned how to set goals, be persistent, follow through with my commitments, and continue to try my best despite challenging circumstances. I found that good things take time and it is important to keep encouraging yourself even when things are not going well. I also discovered how to work with my teammates and support them with their goals. In my reflections on my relationship with physical activity in adolescence, it has become clear to me how important it is to talk positively towards yourself and visualize your performances. I feel like I have taken these teachings and applied them to others aspects of my life and my career.*

*Physical activity also served as a coping strategy for me when life events were difficult. It provided me with an outlet for stress and anger. I would look forward to practices because it was my time and all of life's problems could take the back burner for a while. It made me feel good about myself. Physical activity was my escape; therefore, I was able to avoid getting caught up in risk taking behaviors that often appeal to youth. For example, I was able to refuse things like drugs and alcohol because it would interfere with my training. Participating in such maladaptive behaviors proved to be counterintuitive as I rationalized that I could easily be chosen for drug testing and would not be allowed to compete; it was easy to choose sport over risky behaviors. Furthermore, I found that I preferred other outlets to deal with my problems. I was always so busy in extra-curricular activities after school, that it forced me to budget my time accordingly. In fact, my performance in academics would actually increase with the level of activity I was involved in. My personal background and experiences have motivated me to approach research in this area because I see the value of physical activity as a means for resilience in adolescence, especially for females.*

*Although my personal experiences add authenticity to the current study, it is also important for me to recognize my potential biases and assumptions. I believe that resilience can be*



*attributed to one's experiences in physical activity. Looking back at the current age of 26, I believe my experiences with physical activity have fostered resilience in myself as an adolescent female. However, I understand that not everyone has had the same positive experience with physical activity as I have. It was important for me to be reflexive about my personal stance as I approached data analysis. Although I could not be entirely objective, I consciously tried to look at the data as an outside observer; this way I could ensure it was the meaning and experiences of the participants' emerging, not my own.*

### 1.6 Significance

Understanding the meaning of physical activity for adolescent females with regards to their resilience is an important area of research to address. This type of research benefits society because it provides a greater understanding of the processes adolescent females undergo as they build resilience. In turn, this allows professionals and communities to better support this population. There is existing research suggesting that involvement in physical activity could foster resilience in adolescents by building characteristics such as social competence, autonomy, optimism, and hope (Martinek & Hellison, 1997). These characteristics are important for any adolescent to develop as they transition into adulthood successfully. The current study may have inspired further research and initiatives that aim to explore strength-based and preventative approaches to reaching vulnerable or at risk youth. The examples provided by the participants illustrated generally positive experiences with physical activity, in which the young women were able to cope with and overcome challenging life circumstances. There is still a need for more research in this direction, specifically addressing the needs of adolescent females. The current study provided insight into the personal relationships and experiences the young women shared with physical activity. Their perspectives offered information about what worked and benefited

them during their adolescence so that they could develop resiliently. Through this study, ideas to improve accessibility to physical activity programs and possibly encourage future program initiatives were also suggested. Lastly and perhaps most importantly, the current research study allowed the participants the opportunity to express ownership in their experiences with resilience and empowered them through sharing with others.

### 1.7 Summary

Resilience is a powerful, multifaceted concept that has rich meanings for anyone who has undergone adversity. There is research indicating that youth may develop adaptive qualities by participating in physical activity. Despite the many benefits physical activity can offer, the majority of youth, especially females, remain inactive. There is need for research that enhances understandings about how adolescent females experience physical activity and what defining characteristics of that experience promote resilience. The results of this study have added to the growing body of research in the fields of resilience and physical activity; perhaps it has also influenced the discourse around strength based and preventative interventions for adolescent females.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

*“True enjoyment comes from activity of the mind and exercise of the body; the two are united.”*

- Alexander von Humboldt (Pan- Canadian Joint Consortium For School Health, 2012)

This chapter contains a summary of the literature concerning how physical activity is a means for positive development and resilience in youth, specifically adolescent females. This literature search was conducted using a variety of search engines and resources. There was plenty of literature on the individual topics this study covered; however, the information became limited as all topics were combined. In the following sections, research will be presented regarding how resilience and physical activity among youth are connected and where there are gaps in the research. First, the concept of resilience will be introduced, including the various understandings of the term amongst researchers, followed by an appropriate definition for the current study. Next, resilience will be linked to positive youth development and physical activity. The benefits of physical activity for youth will be presented according to the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional domains of development. The negative outcomes associated with participating in physical activity will also be addressed, specifically the challenges most relevant to adolescent females. This review will conclude with an explanation of why research regarding physical activity and resilience among adolescent females is a valuable and worthy area of research.

### 2.1 Resilience

Resilience is commonly understood as “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (Luthar, Cichetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 543) and can be conceptualized as a trait, a process, or an outcome (Masten, 1994, Windle, 2011). For example, individuals can be described as having the trait of resiliency, to have experienced the process of resilience, or to have demonstrated resilient outcomes. Resilience can also be understood through

a variety of other terms, including invulnerability, hardiness, adaptation, adjustment, mastery, plasticity, person-environment fit, or social buffering (Losel, Bliesener, & Kofler, 1989 as cited in Kaplan, 2005). The American Psychological Association demonstrates the following broad definition: “Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress- such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. It means “bouncing back” from difficult experiences” (APA, n.d.).

Resilience develops as a result of confronting stressful experiences and coping effectively (Schaefer & Moos, 1992 as cited in Kaplan, 2005). As stress is a common part of life, it is likely that all people demonstrate a form of resilience, or successful adaptation, at one point in their development. In fact, all youth in Canada live with risk as they are susceptible to disease, injury and challenges that threaten their mental and physical wellbeing (Willms, 2002). It is the very nature of being human that makes everyone vulnerable to poor life outcomes. Therefore, resilience is a common process that all individuals have first hand experience with.

Resilience is often studied in regards to describing categories of individuals (Kaplan, 2005) such as at risk youth, or individuals who face adverse circumstances that increase the likelihood of developing achievement and behavior problems that could limit their success in adolescence and adulthood (Smith, Polloway, Patton, Carol, McIntyre, & Francis, 2009). Although all Canadian youth live with risk, some are at an increased vulnerability because they are subjected to unduly negative life experiences (Willms, 2002). It is especially important to study this segment of the population because they are at an increased need for services and interventions.

A variety of definitions and perspectives exist to understand resilience. In the following sections, the concept of resilience will be presented from various perspectives and approaches in

this field of research. Specifically, the three critical conditions of resilience research, ecological and constructionist understandings of the term, the waves of resilience research, and how resilience is conceptualized for the current research study will be discussed in the following sections.

### 2.1.1 Critical Conditions of Resilience Research

In a summary of the resilience literature, Windle (2011) suggested that there are three critical conditions to consider and incorporate when studying resilience: 1) growing up amidst distressing life conditions and demanding societal conditions that are considered significant threats or adversities, 2) the availability of protective factors that may counteract risk factors, and 3) the achievement of positive adaptation and development despite the significant adversity. These characteristics of resiliency research are consistently represented in the literature (see Garmezy, 1990; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). Although these characteristics provide a conceptual framework for studying resilience, there is still much ambiguity in the terminology used and variation in the experiences of individuals viewed as resilient (Luthar, Cicchetti, Becker, 2000).

The first condition in studying resilience is the presence of adversity in an individual's life. *Adversity* or risk factors encompass negative life circumstances or individual characteristics that are statistically associated with adjustment difficulties or poor outcomes in one's future development (Luthar, & Cicchetti, 2000; Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009). These risks can be experienced personally, within the community, and/or in family areas (G. Francis, personal communication, March 26, 2009). For example, risks include but are not limited to the following distressing life and societal conditions: poverty, stress, trauma, deprivation, oppression, prejudice, inadequate parenting, family violence, low IQ, and disability (Gitterman,

1991; Lee, Cheung & Kwong, 2011; Luthar, & Cicchetti, 2000; Willms, 2002). These examples of adversity are represented through personal, community, or family categories; however, there is also overlap between categories. For example, poverty and violence may be a community and/or family adversity. A common theme among these characteristics of adversity is that they lie outside of the individual's control. At risk youth have no choice in their biological make-up, nor the community they reside in, or the family that cares for them. In the context of the current study, the term adversity is conceptualized as an uncontrollable internal or external life circumstance that individuals perceive as significantly difficult to overcome.

The second condition of resilience research involves the availability of protective factors. Protective factors are biological, psychological, and/or environmental processes that modify, ameliorate, or alter a person's response to some environmental stressor that would otherwise predispose him or her to maladaptive outcomes (Gitterman, 1991; Rutter, 1985; Rutter, 1990). Factors such as self-regulation skills, good parenting, community resources, effective schools, close relations with supportive adults, and connections with competent, pro-social adults in the wider community serve to protect human development under diverse conditions (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009). It is human nature to adapt and be resilient, however these innate qualities need to be fostered and protected (Masten, 2001). If vulnerable youth have adaptive qualities or protective factors to help them overcome challenges, they are more likely to be resilient and thrive despite the adversity they endured. Prior research has demonstrated that physical activity can serve as a medium to provide youth access to external or internal protective factors such as supportive relationships with adults and peers (Goodman, 1999) or life skills including goal setting and planning, which all work to buffer at risk youth from poor life outcomes (Martinek & Hellison, 1997).

The final condition of resilience research regards the attainment of positive adaptation or outcomes despite the presence of adversity. The meaning of positive adaptation varies in the resilience literature. For example, in some cases positive adaptation is achieved when there is an absence of psychopathology or low levels of negative symptoms while other cases suggest maintaining competence, returning to normal functioning, or thriving and flourishing are required (Windle, 2011). Other research suggests that positive adaptation is not necessary and that individuals can experience resilience through maladaptive behaviors and actions, such as substance abuse (Ungar, 2004). Ultimately, individual experiences of resilience are represented in their journeys to defining themselves as healthy despite adverse conditions (Ungar, 2004b).

#### 2.1.2 Ecological & Constructionist Approaches

Ecological and constructionist approaches to resilience research illuminate different conceptualizations and worldviews of what it means to be resilient. An ecological approach to resilience research focuses on the predictable or causal relationships between risk and protective factors (Ungar 2004a). With this frame of reference, resilience is defined as “a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (Masten, 2001, p. 228). This type of research involves measurable variables including risk factors and protective factors. A person is considered resilient if they achieve life outcomes that are statistically better than expected based on the variables they were exposed to (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). In contrast to the ecological approach, a constructionist approach to resilience focuses on the individual’s perspective of their situation. A constructionist approach to resilience defines the term as an outcome from negotiations between individuals and their environments for the resources they need to define themselves as healthy despite conditions collectively deemed as adverse (Ungar, 2004b). The constructionist perspective accounts for the

cultural and contextual differences in how resilience is expressed by individuals, families, and communities (Ungar, 2004a). Both the ecological and constructionist approaches to resilience research are important as they enhance our knowledge about this crucial area. The ecological approach provides information about objective variables that statistically influence life outcomes in youth, whereas the constructionist approach brings light to the individual perspectives on their journeys to defining themselves as healthy.

The dominant discourse with resilience research has involved an ecological understanding of the term, whereas a constructionist perspective is recently becoming more acknowledged (Ungar, 2004a). Resilience research approached with an ecological lens examines the behaviors and psychosocial characteristics of ‘at risk’ youth; however, more research is needed to increase understandings of the experiential processes supporting resilience (Ungar, 2005; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). This shift in research is important because it could decrease the emphasis on deficits and pathologies in vulnerable youth (Shek, Sun, & Merrick, 2012). Although an ecological perspective is valuable to explain factors proven to influence resilience in youth, there is little room in this type of research for understanding the individual experiences and processes youth encounter as they demonstrate resilience (Ungar, 2005). Ungar (2005) proposed that youth undergoing adversity experience a dual process of navigation and negotiation as they make use of the resources they need to survive. They seek multiple services or relationships, which they creatively utilize to meet their needs. Too much emphasis is on the individual to seek out these services; more attention is needed to address the ways systems are coordinated to meet the needs of that individual (Luthar, 2005). This requires service providers to understand the perceptions of those using the service. Understanding personal perspectives could allow professionals to intervene with vulnerable youth in meaningful, individual, and effective ways.



### 2.1.3 Waves of Resiliency Research

Three waves of inquiry are identified in Richardson's (2002) metatheory of resilience and resiliency, which described the various theoretical movements in available literature. The first wave of research involved studying internal and external qualities of individuals that are related to personal and social success despite adversity. Examples of these qualities included high self-esteem and self-efficacy. The second wave of research involved studying how individuals acquired qualities that allowed them to successfully adapt to adverse circumstances. For example, individuals could reintegrate after adversity with loss, back to their comfort zone, or with resilience. In the second wave of research, value is placed on the processes individuals go through to achieve resilience. The third wave of research involved studying the motivational forces within individuals or groups and how these forces could be activated through experiences. This type of research proved applicable to counselling and educational settings where individuals are encouraged to discover and apply the forces that drive them to self-actualization and to resiliently reintegrate from disruptions (Richardson, 2002). More research is needed that explains *how* resilient qualities are acquired and the experiential processes people undergo as they determine how they will react to threatening circumstances (Richardson, 2002); this involves studying the interactions between risk exposure and the solutions youth find to cope with their personal and environmental challenges (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009). In the current study, it was revealed that physical activity played an important role in the solutions young women found to cope with such challenges.

### 2.1.4 Summary

The literature suggests that there are three critical conditions to guide resilience research, that resilience can be understood with ecological and constructionist approaches, and that there are

different waves guiding the focus of resilience discourse. The study of resilience is a complex avenue to explore, as there are a range of theories describing its meaning and approaches to conducting research in this area (Lee, Cheung, & Kwong, 2012; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Richardson, 2002; Ungar, 2004a; Windle, 2011). As there is abundant literature providing guidance regarding what resilience means, it is important to identify a definition that is most relevant to my study. I approached my research questions with a constructivist lens, suitable to qualitative research, as will be explained further in Chapter 3. My study fits best within the second wave of resiliency research, as the focus was on the processes individuals experience in the achievement of resilient qualities. In a literature review conceptualizing resilience, Windle (2011) put forth the following definition:

Resilience is the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and ‘bouncing back’ in the face of adversity. Across the life course, the experience of resilience will vary. (p. 163)

This definition is appropriate for the current research study because it is an inclusive compilation of the ideas in the literature. It also stresses that resilience is a dynamic process that influences individuals differently. This definition guided my research; however, my primary focus was identifying individual perspectives and experiences pertaining to resilience.

## 2.2 Resilience & Positive Youth Development

The concept of resilience is often associated with positive youth development, a term describing the natural process youth undergo and the idea that they all have the potential to thrive and develop optimally (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004; Kia-Keating, Dowdy, Morgan, & Noam, 2011; Lee, Cheung, & Kwong, 2012; Schwartz, Pantin, Coatsworth, & Szapocznik,

2007). When youth develop optimally, they lead healthy, satisfying, and productive lives; and later as adults, they gain the competence to earn a living, engage in civic activities, nurture others, and participate in social relations and cultural activities (Hamilton, et al., 2004). There are programs, organizations, and initiatives that support youth through practices and facilitate positive developmental outcomes (Hamilton et al., 2004). Resilience and positive youth development are similar in that they both provide pathways to healthy development through promoting assets in youth or protecting them from risk factors (Kia-Keating et al., 2011).

Although resilience and positive youth development are similar, they are not synonymous (Lee et al., 2012; Schwartz et al., 2007). The terms often overlap and are utilized interchangeably as they both aim to instill protective factors and developmental assets in youth. Conceptually, both resilience and positive youth development are grounded in the fact that all youth have the potential to ameliorate or avoid problematic outcomes and become contributing if not thriving members of society (Schwartz et al., 2007). Resilience is understood as a contributor to positive youth development with the condition that adversity is present (Lee et al., 2012). Resilience and positive youth development have the same goals of positive life outcomes; however, they cannot be equated, as adversity is a requirement of resiliency but not positive youth development.

### 2.3 Benefits of Physical Activity for Positive Youth Development

*Physical activity*, a term often used interchangeably with physical fitness and exercise, is a broad concept that involves all leisure and nonleisure body movement resulting in an increase of energy expenditure (Caspersen, Powell, & Christenson, 1985; Hahn, Payne, Gallant, & Fletcher, 2006). In order to attain optimal health benefits, youth in Canada aged 12-17 should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity daily (Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, 2011). This should include vigorous intensity activities at least 3 days

per week and activities that strengthen muscle and bone at least 3 times a week. Moderate intensity activities are those that cause individuals to sweat and breathe a little harder such as skating and bike riding; whereas, vigorous activities are those that cause individuals to sweat and be out of breath such as running and rollerblading (Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, 2011).

Available research has demonstrated how programs use physical activity as a medium to promote positive development and resilience in youth (Douyon, Chavez, Bunte, Horsburgh, & Strunin, 2010; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Holt, Kingsley, & Scherer, 2011; Madsen, Hicks, & Thompson, 2011; Petitpas, Cornelius, Raalte, & Jones, 2005). Specifically, some physical activity programs have shown to support positive outcomes in youth through the use of developmentally appropriate designs, which build their abilities in social and personal domains (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Holt et al., 2011). Physical activity programs aimed to promote psychosocial skills in youth use physical activity as a vehicle to provide experiences that support self-discovery and teach life skills in an intentional and systematic manner (Petitpas et al., 2005). These types of programs are well planned, organized, and structured in order to facilitate the development of important skills. It is not physical activity alone that is creating positive youth development. Rather, it is the way these programs are delivered that provides a positive impact on youth.

The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine has outlined four broad domains of youth development: physical, intellectual, psychological/emotional, and social (NCRIM, 2002). Within each domain, the researchers listed several corresponding assets to facilitate positive youth development. In the physical domain, assets included good health habits and health risk management. Assets such as knowledge of essential life, vocational, decision-making, and

critical reasoning skills made up the intellectual domain. The psychological or emotional domain involved multiple assets including good mental health, positive self-regard, coping and conflict resolution skills, motivation, a sense of autonomy, moral character, and confidence. Lastly, the assets that contributed to the social domain included connectedness with parents, peers, and other adults in addition to a sense of social place, a commitment to civic engagement and an attachment to pro-social or conventional institutions.

Research has demonstrated that youth experience many positive developmental outcomes through involvement in sport and physical activity programs; these initiatives include enhancing assets or protective factors in the lives of young people (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). The following sections will highlight this research using the domains of physical, intellectual, psychological/emotional, and social development (NCRIM, 2002) as a framework to illustrate how physical activity is being used as a vehicle to promote positive youth development.

### 2.3.1 Physical Benefits of Physical Activity

The physical benefits of physical activity are vast and well researched. Proper amounts of physical activity enable the body to develop and prosper at optimal levels. For example, physical activity is a necessity for normal growth and development in children and adolescents (Bar-Or, 1983). With obesity rates and other related diseases on a dramatic rise amongst the general population of Canada, particularly in children (Tremblay, Katzmarzyk, & Willms, 2002), the importance of physical activity is gaining considerable attention amongst researchers (Fraser-Thomas et al. 2007). Not only does physical activity foster cardiovascular fitness and weight control, it also improves muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, and bone density (Hahn, Payne, Gallant, & Fletcher, 2006; Health Canada, 2011).

Particularly relevant to my work, research has demonstrated that physically active humans and animals are more resistant to the negative impacts of stressor exposure on physical and mental health than their sedentary counterparts (Brown & Siegel, 1988; Dishman, Bunnell, Youngstedt, Yoo, Mougey, & Meyerhoff, 1998; Fleshner, Maier, Lyon, & Raskind, 2011; Taylor, Sallis, & Needle, 1985). For example, Brown and Siegel (1998) conducted a longitudinal study with 364 females in grades 7 to 11 in Los Angeles, California in which exercise was examined as a means to buffer stress induced deterioration of physical health. Participants completed surveys measuring their stress, physical health, and exercise levels. Exercise was shown to be a valuable source for combating stress as it was illustrated that the negative impacts of stressful life events declined as exercise levels increased. This evidence shows that youth function better when they are engaging in regular physical activity. However, in reality, Canadian youth and adults on average are not getting enough daily physical activity to receive such benefits (Mulholland, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2011).

The physical activity habits individuals develop in childhood are associated with the habits individuals make as adults (Dishman, Sallis, & Orenstein, 1985; Health Canada, 2011; Tammelin, Näyhä, Hills, & Järvelin, 2003). Encouraging participation in physical activity amongst disadvantaged youth through financial assistance and other initiatives could actually reduce the financial burden on the health care system in the long term (Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011; Mulholland, 2008). The long term benefits of physical activity in relation to monetary savings was demonstrated in a Canadian study which predicted that youth who participated in quality recreation/sport programs would cost \$500 less per annum in health and social services than youth who did not receive such programming (Browne, 2011). Improving physical activity levels among Canadians by just 10 percent would save Canadians over \$150

million annually in direct health care costs alone (Mulholland, 2008). Dr. Nick Cavill, a health promotion consultant, explained: "If exercise were a pill, it would be one of the most cost-effective drugs ever invented" (Benefits of Exercise, 2013). With all the known physical benefits and disease prevention related to physical activity, it is clear that interventions with youth should be a priority for the health of individuals in Canada.

### 2.3.2 Intellectual Benefits of Physical Activity

There is research to demonstrate that integrating more physical activity into the school day could be an effective strategy to increase academic performance (Dwyer, Sallis, Blizzard, Lazarus, & Dean, 2001; Efrat, 2011). Studies have shown that physical activity can increase cognitive functioning among elementary and middle age children (Sibley & Etnier, 2003) and that aerobic fitness is related to better executive control (i.e., cognitive processes including planning, working memory, coordination, and inhibitory control) in children (Buck, Hillman, & Castelli, 2008). There is a body of research connecting physical activity with benefits in brain function, including the development of more neurons or "neurogenesis", resulting in improved learning and memory (Praag, 2009; Praag, 2008; Praag, Shubert, Zhao, & Gage, 2005). The above findings demonstrate how physical activity is important for optimal intellectual development.

A recent study connected exposure to a program known as "Playworks" to higher rates of physical activity, meaningful participation at school, problem solving skills, as well as goals and aspirations in Californian elementary aged children from low-income communities (Madsen, Hicks, & Thompson, 2011). The "Playworks" program provided trained coaches to schools to teach a variety of sports and games during recess and lunch, consult with teachers to incorporate physical activity into the school curriculum, promote leadership in the school, and bring families

and communities together through play and physical activity. This high quality and structured program fostered positive qualities in the youth who had access to it (Madsen et al., 2011). Not only does physical activity give physiological benefits that positively influence people's cognitive abilities, it can also offer opportunities for youth to practice important academic, social, and life skills as demonstrated with the Playworks program. Other research has shown that participating in physical activity programs such as after school sports has been linked to positive benefits in the academic performances of youth (Nettles, Mucherah, & Jones, 2000). Given the academic and cognitive benefits of physical activity, parents and educators are encouraged to incorporate as many opportunities for youth to be active as possible.

### 2.3.3 Emotional or Psychological Benefits of Physical Activity

Research has demonstrated that physical activity is associated with improved mental health or emotional and or psychological benefits (Paluska & Schwenk, 2000; Taylor, Sallis, & Needle, 1985). Physical activity offers youth opportunities to feel enjoyment, enhance self-esteem, decrease stress and anxiety, and alleviate depression (Health Canada, 2011; Long 1985; Mulholland, 2008). In addition, participating in structured extracurricular pursuits such as physical activity has been associated with higher life satisfaction amongst adolescents (Gilman, 2001). Life satisfaction is a cognitive component that plays an important role in positive youth development (Park, 2004); therefore, fostering physical activity in youth could be important for their psychological and emotional development.

Research shows the relationship between self-esteem and physical activity to be provided through team sports and individual sports. For example, a study demonstrated that individuals who participate in team sports and individual sports do not differ significantly in their perceptions of conditional self worth (Lockart, Black, & Vincent, 2010). Both groups of athletes



rated themselves higher on unconditional or inherent self worth in comparison to conditional self worth which is less stable and more dependent on performance (Lockart et al., 2010). Although team sports tend to build social self-efficacy to a greater extent than individual sports, it is suggested that this could also be achieved through training for individual sports in groups (Dinc, 2011). In summary, research has demonstrated that physical activity can develop youth's psychological and or emotional characteristics in areas such self-perception, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, in addition to alleviating symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.

#### 2.3.4 Social Benefits of Physical Activity

The experiences youth gain from being involved in sports and physical activity can foster adaptive social development through building citizenship (Elley & Kirk, 2002), positive peer relationships (Evans & Roberts, 1987; Weiss, Smith, & Theeboom, 1996), and leadership skills (Wright & Côté, 2003). There are many characteristics about the atmosphere of physical activity settings that work to enhance social development in youth. Coaches have the opportunity to promote prosocial behaviors in youth by modeling and encouraging positive interactions with peers (Côté, 2002). Physical activity is connected to the development of social and behavioral processes in youth. For example, participating in physical activity allows adolescents' access to role models, peer networks, opportunities for teamwork, social development, problem solving, and effective outlets for energy (Nelson & Gordon-Larsen, 2006). These kinds of attributes, gained through participation in physical activity, are important for youth to acquire as they can be applied in other aspects of life.

Physical activity has also been linked to pro-social behaviors through means other than direct participation. For example, physical activity has provided a medium for young adults to volunteer and develop a sense of citizenship in their communities (Eley & Kirk, 2002). A large

proportion of young people find that volunteering through physical activity is appealing because not only does it offer help and resources to the community, but it also provides many social and physical skills that encourage personal development (Elley & Kirk, 2002). A qualitative research study by Wright and Côté (2003) examined the development of leadership in six Canadian male varsity athletes who participated in similar team sports. The athletes reflected on their past involvement in activities including their behaviors, social influences, and relationships. The results of their study demonstrated that leadership development in sport is attributed to fostering four central components in youth: high skill, strong work ethic, enriched cognitive sport knowledge, and good rapport with people. These athletes were also exposed to lots of fun, nonthreatening sports environments, parents who provided lots of support and acted as play partners, in addition to early participation with older peers. These characteristics may have fostered early skill development in the research participants. Studies such as that conducted by Wright and Côté's (2003) supply first hand experience from athletes about the social benefits of physical activity. Available research demonstrates that physical activity can promote social development in youth; it is a practical method for learning and practicing essential skills that involve working with others.

### 2.3.5 Potential Negative Consequences of Physical Activity

The research above demonstrates that physical activity can be a means for promoting positive youth development by instilling physical, intellectual, psychological/emotional, and social qualities in youth; however, there is also research that cautions against making the broad assumption that participating in physical activity is *always* beneficial for the development of youth. Physical activity has been connected to a wide range of negative outcomes in youth development such as sports related injuries (Steiner, McQuivery, Pavelski, Pitts, & Kraemer,

2000), eating disorders (Anshel, 2004; Reel & Gill, 1996), athletic burnout (Coakley, 1982; Smith, 1986), as well as violence and aggression (Colburn, 1986). This demonstrates that there are contradictions in the literature and more research is needed to clarify how physical activity is connected to development in youth. Although the current study did not specifically address those contradictions, it did provide perspectives of youth who have had unique and generally positive experiences with physical activity. Their perspectives will help determine the defining characteristics of experiences with physical activity that lead to positive youth development.

#### 2.4 Resilience and Physical Activity

As presented in the previous section, there is research support for the positive impacts of physical activity on youth development, however there is limited research in the context of youth who have faced adversity. Previous research has demonstrated that physical activity is connected to positive youth development (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005), but the voices and perspectives of youth who have faced adversity are mostly absent from this literature. In addition, literature regarding physical activity behaviors is predominantly *on* adolescents as opposed to being *with* or *for* them (Darbyshire, Macdougall, & Schiller, 2005). Carless and Douglas (2010) explored the relationship of physical activity and mental health. They discussed how the majority of the literature focuses on measurement (i.e., what physical activity takes away in terms of symptoms, impairments and problems) as opposed to meaning (i.e., what physical activity contributes or brings to a person's life). This is worrisome because the specific *ways* in which sport and physical activity help people has been sidelined in the literature and is a valuable area to address (Carless & Douglas, 2010).

The popular belief that involvement in physical activity can help youth develop prosocial skills leads to the speculation that it could serve as an ideal context to engage at risk youth

(Sandford, Armour, & Warmington, 2006). There are many things about physical activity that make it an appropriate medium to reach youth in need. For example, mentorship or ‘a helping relationship’ with a caring adult or older student is an important factor for instilling resilience in youth (Goodman, 1999). A mentor could be in the role of a coach or older athlete (Springborn, 1997). The facts that regular physical activity has been connected to improving classroom behavior, concentration, self-esteem, and motivation to learn in youth (Canadian Fitness & Lifestyle Research Institute, 2010) show that it is fostering adaptive qualities in these individuals. It is also functioning as a mechanism to protect youth from developing less adaptive qualities and therefore fostering resilience (Martinek & Hellison, 1997). Research with elite athletes has demonstrated how sport can serve as a mode for individuals to learn how to cope with adversities and perceive these times as opportunities for personal growth and development (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993; Galli & Vealey, 2008). More research is needed to determine the defining characteristics of youth’s experiences with physical activity and the meaning it has in developing resiliency.

Physical activity has also been connected to helping youth rehabilitate after being institutionalized for criminal activity (Andrews & Andrews, 2003). A qualitative study explored the suitability of sporting activities as the primary vehicle of rehabilitation of male and female youth between the ages of 10 and 17 in Southern England, UK (Andrews & Andrews, 2003). Findings demonstrated that physical activity was an appropriate mechanism for rehabilitation in youth. Benefits from physical activity were greatest when regulations and winning were de-emphasized and when providing choice, tailoring for individual needs and distributing positive feedback were emphasized (Andrews & Andrews, 2003). Thus, physical activity is not only

connected to resilience as it prevents youth from negative life outcomes; it is also functions as mechanism to facilitate healing in youth who have already experienced poor outcomes.

Adolescence is a time where individuals begin planning for their futures and where youth have the opportunity to adopt healthy attitudes that could counter risk-taking behaviors and ultimately lead to a lifetime of desirable health behaviors (Wu, Rose, & Bancroft, 2006). Research is needed with populations who are at risk for poor developmental outcomes because of personal and environmental contexts. These youth are perhaps in need of interventions the most because they may gain personal and social benefits they likely would not experience otherwise (Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011). There is evidence suggesting that engagement in a diverse range of physical activities is associated with decreased chances of adolescents being involved in health risk behaviors related to factors such as: sexual activity, delinquency, smoking, alcohol and drug usage, truancy, and seatbelt usage (Nelson & Gordon-Larsen, 2006). Hence, physical activity could be a constructive way to reach adolescents who are at a higher risk for poor life outcomes.

#### 2.4.1 Physical Activity Programs Fostering Resilience

Youth sport programs that promote psychosocial development use sport as a method to provide experiences that aid in self-discovery and teach individuals life skills in an intentional and systematic manner (Petitpas, Cornelious, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). Through these programs, youth can learn skills and acquire experiences that are transferable into personal aspects of their lives. Previous research has indicated that quality physical activity programming is related to resilience in youth (Collingwood, 1997; Martinek & Hellison, 1997). Such programs involve developing positive values and life skills such as goal setting and planning (Collingwood, 1997). In addition, participants learn to take responsibility for their own effort and

goals as well as enacting social responsibility through respecting the rights of others (Martinek & Hellison, 1997).

Resilient children possess traits of social competence, autonomy, optimism, and hope (Martinek & Hellison, 1997). These traits are developed through quality physical activity programs that teach and emphasize skills in the areas of: teamwork, goal setting, conflict resolution, and personal/social responsibility (Martinek & Hellison, 1997). Quality physical activity programs that develop these resiliency traits are preventative and strength based approaches to enhance resilience in adolescent participants (Martinek & Hellison, 1997). However, the *quality* of the physical activity programs is an important aspect in such programs. There are many factors that contribute to quality physical activity programs such as trained coaches, involvement of parents, personal experiences and resources (Petitpas, Cornelis, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). This means that one cannot equate physical activity programs with resilience because there are so many external and individual aspects that make up a quality program.

## 2.5 Adolescent Females & Physical Activity

*Adolescence* is defined as the period of transition across the second decade of life where biological, psychological, and social characteristics undergo change in an interrelated manner as a person becomes adultlike (Lerner, Brown, & Kier, 2005). The period of adolescence in the lifespan was chosen for the current study because it is assumed that it is a time in development when people are at risk for making decisions that might have adverse consequences related to their social, intellectual, physical and psychological or emotional well-being (Lerner et al., 2005). Adolescence is a time with challenges, especially for females. During adolescence, females' dissatisfaction with their bodies increases and they are more likely than males to

develop eating disorders (Lerner et al., 2005). In addition, female adolescents experience poorer psychosocial health in somatic, depressive, and internalizing areas (Räty, Larsson, Psychol, Söderfeldt, & Larsson, 2004). It is crucial that adolescent females receive interventions that could enhance their wellbeing and prevent poor health.

### 2.5.1 The Gender Gap in Physical Activity

Despite all the positive outcomes that participating in physical activity may offer adolescent females, there are significant gender differences in physical activity rates. Adolescent males were almost twice as likely as adolescent females (28% and 15%, respectively) to meet the international physical activity guidelines for optimal growth and development (Statistics Canada, 2005). Although adolescent females could benefit greatly from physical activity, they face social barriers to participation such as gender ideologies and stereotypes. Gender ideologies and stereotypes discourage adolescent females from participating in physical activity because it is dominantly considered a masculine endeavor and they may not want to compromise their femininity (Adams, Schmitke, & Franklin, 2005). To illustrate, participation in physical activity is typically associated with sweating, competitiveness, and no make up or jewelry, all of which challenge the norms of feminine qualities and behaviors (Adams et al., 2005). It is important to address and break down the social barriers limiting participation rates and experiences of adolescent females (FERENCE, 2004) so that they can have equitable access the confidence, independence, and joy gained through participation in physical activity (Adams et al., 2005).

There have been legal interventions to address the disparities regarding participation in sports and physical activity between males and females. The passage of Title IX in 1972 resulted in a law that prohibited sex discrimination in educational institutions receiving federal dollars in the United States (Sandler, 2006). This law applies to all aspects of education such as postsecondary

decisions involving admissions, financial assistance, housing, and harassment in addition to its role in intercollegiate athletics (Beaubier, 2004). There is no Canadian law equivalent to Title IX, however Canadian Interuniversity Sport, the national body that governs intercollegiate athletics, has been influenced by this law and has developed policies to instill gender equity and equality (Beaubier, 2004). These policies include objectives such as having a minimum of 40% representation of one gender on committees, increasing the marketability of women's programs, and balancing competitive opportunities for both genders. Although there has been much improvement as a result of the laws and policies requiring educational institutions to distribute equal resources for males' and females' athletic programs, there are still disparities. For example, social practices such as girls having limited choice of physical activities at school or the sparse and inconvenient television footage of women's elite sports work to maintain a gender gap in participation rates, norms, as well as expectations (Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2006; Duncan, 2006; Zimmerman & Reavilm, 1998). The legal initiatives have been a move in a positive direction to bridge this gap; however, there is still more work to do to achieve equitable experiences between the genders. Therefore, it is beneficial to explore the phenomena of these experiences from a group that holds a common understanding based on their gender.

#### 2.5.2 Benefits of Physical Activity for Adolescent Females

There are specific psychological and social benefits that adolescent females experience as a result of engaging in physical activity. For example, they experience above average self-confidence and moral development (Perry-Burney & Takyi, 2002). Adolescent females in developing worlds have received unique benefits. Their access to social networks has been shown to increase with participation rates; thus, bringing them into the public sphere and transforming gender norms (Brady, 2005). Participating in sport specifically, allows adolescent



females to be in control, develop competence, and create a space for themselves as individuals (Perry-Burney & Takyi, 2002). It is important that adolescent females are encouraged to see themselves as strong, independent, and capable people. Physical activity can be a means for young women to have safe mobility and access to public space in addition to groups that provide social support; these are critical outcomes often overlooked in initiatives (Brady, 2005).

Team sports specifically, have shown to impact adolescent female's emotional being in adaptive ways. For example, adolescent females who experience achievement in team sports in early adolescence are likely to have high self-esteem in middle adolescence, a time where self esteem generally decreases for girls (Pederson & Seidman, 2004). In addition, participation in team sports is positively related to improved self-perception, while informal exercise is related to social acceptance and global self worth in middle adolescent females (Ference, 2004). Self-efficacy, a related term to self-confidence and self esteem, refers to the beliefs people have in their abilities to organize and execute behaviors that produce specific attainments (Bosscher & Smit, 1998). Self-efficacy is developed when adolescent females participate in team sports and is demonstrated in their higher academics, participation in extracurricular activities in school, and their relationships with friends and families (Perry-Burney & Takyi, 2002). The research above suggests that being involved in team sports teaches adolescent females to work hard, persevere, and believe in their abilities. These findings demonstrate the importance of encouraging adolescent females to become involved in physical activity, specifically team sports, as it could help them develop their emotional wellbeing.

### 2.5.3 Negative Consequences of Physical Activity for Female Adolescents

Physical activity has been shown to be connected to decreasing risk behaviors in adolescents, however there is also research indicating that this is not always the case with females

particularly. For example, excessive physical activity has been shown to play a pathogenic role in the onset and maintenance of eating disorders as demonstrated in activities where slenderness is encouraged such as dance or gymnastics (Davis, Kennedy, Ravelski, & Dionne, 1994). However, this idea has also been debated. Engaging in physical activity is actually recommended in the prevention of eating disorders and is quite different than situations where people engage in physical activity in compulsive manners (Goñi & Rodríguez, 2007). In fact, women who exercise have been shown to have more positive perceptions of their bodies than those who do not exercise (Furnham, Titman, & Sleeman, 1994). The potential pathogenic role of physical activity for adolescent females is important to consider when working with and promoting physical activity within this group. Perhaps, ensuring that physical activity is encouraged as a way to enhance wellbeing as opposed to achieving appearance oriented goals may help in delivering positive programs for adolescent females.

#### 2.5.4 Trends in Physical Activity Programs for Adolescent Females

There is much scholarly academic research supporting the benefits of physical activity for adolescent females; however, there is less demonstrating how physical activity is experienced as a means for resilience in this population. Nonetheless, just listening to the news or looking at advertisements in the community, it appears that physical activity is making a significant impact in the lives of young women. There are programs and initiatives taking place locally and internationally that are highlighting the importance of physical activity for female adolescents and providing examples for how to engage this population. There are initiatives in Canada that are promoting physical activity in young women for a variety of reasons including encouraging leadership, self esteem, and healthy living. For example, Girl Guides of Canada, ParticipACTION, and the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and

Physical Activity (CAAWS) have all acknowledged the importance of physical activity for young women in numerous ways.

ParticipACTION, a national nonprofit organization, is dedicated to supporting active living and sport participation for Canadians (ParticipACTION, 2011). In their past annual report, ParticipACTION (2011) acknowledged the range of impact that physical activity can have on youth and adults. In addition to the obvious health benefits, they reported that physically active children are more socially confident and more successful in school than those who are sedentary. These children also have a more positive outlook on life and experience better mental health than their less active peers. ParticipACTION is committed to raising awareness about the importance of physical activity and how it can be incorporated into daily living. It has developed many recent initiatives such as the Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, ParticipACTION Tool Kit, and Dare2Move campaign (ParticipACTION, 2011). These initiatives were aimed directly at youth to encourage physical activity.

Organizations are using physical activity as a means to develop the well-being of women and adolescent females. For example, Girl Guides of Canada strives to include physical activity in each of their meetings. This is done to encourage healthy living and learning by ‘doing’ (Girl Guides of Canada, 2011). The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) is an organization that aims to provide leadership, education, diverse opportunities and positive experiences in sport and physical activity for women (CAAWS, n.d.). CAAWS has many initiatives developed to encourage physical activity for young women such as On The Move and Girls@Play. They also have initiatives geared towards women of all ages such as the Women and Leadership Network and VIEWS (CAAWS, n.d.).

The purposes of these programs range from providing a common ground for women to share ideas to supporting physical activity through resources and grants.

Programs are developing in other countries where low physical activity rates among young women are also worrisome. For example, Fit for Girls is a program being delivered to girls between the ages of 11-16 in all secondary schools in Scotland (Inchley, Mitchell, & Currie, 2010). The purpose of Fit for Girls is to give low active girls and young women opportunities and choices to achieve the social, psychological, intellectual and physical benefits associated with physical activity. They are achieving this goal by surveying girls and young women as well as providing workshops for practitioners. In Scotland, 17 853 girls in 398 schools completed questionnaires on which they provided their opinions about physical activity, physical education, extra-curricular activities, as well as their health and wellbeing. This information allowed the practitioners to incorporate the girls' perspectives into their programming and make it more appealing to their needs. The workshops that practitioners attended allowed them to share knowledge, tools, and skills so that they can develop sustainable physical activity programs that meet the needs of adolescent girls and young women (Inchley, Mitchell, & Currie, 2010). Fit for Girls is an active example of how practitioners are recognizing the importance of adapting physical activity programming to the needs of young women.

As a student at the University of Saskatchewan, I am particularly interested in the initiatives we are doing in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. For example, 'Girls in Motion' is a program that operates in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan that focuses on exposing young girls to a variety of different sports (Knoll, 2012). Girls in Motion was developed to encourage girls to get the amount of physical activity they need, to experience increased self esteem and social abilities, as well as happiness and health (Knoll, 2012). By demonstrating different physical activity options,

this initiative might be able to influence these young girls to live active lifestyles throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

The initiatives and evidence above indicates that the importance of physical activity for young women is being recognized from local to worldwide levels. People are realizing the importance these initiatives stand for as evidenced in the publicity and support these programs are receiving. It is exciting to see how physical activity is being applied into the lives of young women with the purpose of developing them in all aspects of their lives. The skills young women are learning through physical activity may ultimately give them the resources they need to be resilient.

#### 2.5.5 Resilience and Physical Activity in Adolescent Females

Physical activity programming directed specifically at adolescent females could be an effective approach to promote resilience. As females enter adolescence, their experience with physical, social-emotional, and cognitive changes negatively impact their self-perceptions; therefore it is a crucial time for interventions (FERENCE, 2004). Adolescent females face adversity differently than males and are more likely to experience mood, anxiety, and eating disorders; this may reflect differences of social expectations and the unique challenges adolescent females face in Canadian society (Government of Canada, 2006). Higher proportions of adolescent females than males report their ability to handle unexpected problems as fair or poor; it is recommended that initiatives be implemented to support adolescent female's problem solving skills and self efficacy (Government of Canada, 2006). Programming that involves physical activity could provide a unique avenue for such interventions.

Resilience is evident when adolescents exhibit patterns of positive adaptation despite the context of significant risk (Luthar, 2003). As females approach adversity in adolescence, there are effective long-term strategies they can utilize to develop resilience (Shepard, Renyolds, &

Moran, 2010). These strategies include: making visible progress with their education, rebuilding relationships with family and friends, and participating in ‘normalizing’ activities and developmental projects of adolescence. These strategies contribute to resilience by strengthening self worth, re-appraisal of the adversity, responsibility, and sense of control (Shepard et al., 2010). Participation in physical activity can function as a normalizing activity that develops these qualities and therefore facilitates long term strategies that encourage resilience (Martinek, 1997).

There are programs geared specifically towards at risk adolescent females, which incorporate physical activity as a method to teach skills that promote resilience. One study that was conducted in the form of an operational research project assessed the effects of implementing an organized physical activity and health education program, known as ‘GirlStars’, to adolescent girls living in public housing in Boston, Massachusetts (Douyon, Chavez, Bunte, Horsburgh, & Strunin, 2010). Participants increased their health knowledge, self-confidence, and decision-making skills. Another program known as ‘Sportsbridge,’ which is based out of San Francisco Bay, California, provided athletic mentorship to middle school girls by pairing them with volunteer women athletes from local colleges and the corporate world (Springborn, 1997). This program was promoted with the belief that it was a preventative approach, using sport as a vehicle to teach lifelong lessons and help reach young girls before they have the opportunity to make poor life decisions. Through interactions with adult mentors and participation in organized activities, young girls learned to compete, cooperate, deal with successes and failures, maintain long lasting friendships, as well as increase self-image, confidence, and awareness about health habits (Springborn, 1997). Programs such GirlStars and Sportsbridge demonstrate that the benefits of physical activity are vast and varied among different domains of wellbeing. These

programs also demonstrate how physical activity can serve as a catalyst for promoting resilience in young women, so long as these programs are well led and structured.

Programs are being developed that are designed to help young women cope with and confront social inequalities using sport as the medium for delivery. For example, Box Girls International is a social profit organization that works under the beliefs that well designed and delivered programs involving sport and leadership will change the lives of young women (Box Girls International, 2012). This organization was developed by Heather Cameron, a Vancouver native, who is now an Assistant Professor of Education at the Freie Universität Berlin and an Associate Professor Extradinarius at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa (Quandt, 2010). Box Girls International is a developing organization with programs around the world including: Berlin Kreuzberg (2005), Nairobi (2007), and Cape Town (2009). Cameron discussed the impact of her program at a conference in Marrakesh (TEDx Marrakesh, 2011), where she explained how Box Girls has influenced the lives and perspectives of the young women she works with. Box Girls has increased young women's tolerance, feelings of security, and most importantly self-actualization, or the idea that if you make an effort something will happen. This program demonstrates an example of how sport or physical activity can provide a medium to teach young women life skills that promote resilience.

## 2.6 Summary

The literature discussed above supports the rationale for the current research study. There are significant amounts of research available about resilience, but there is little on the topic as it relates to females and physical activity. Reviewed research illustrates the benefits of physical activity for positive youth development; however, it is limited from a resiliency perspective. More research is needed to determine the role of physical activity in facilitating resilience among

youth who have faced adversity. Specifically, research is needed to exemplify the experiences of active adolescent females, as their perspectives are valuable in understanding what characterizes meaningful and positive relationships with physical activity. The qualitative nature of the current research study has filled gaps in the available literature by illustrating the characteristics of adolescent female's experiences with physical activity as a means for resilience. This type of research could help educators, coaches, and parents support this group of individuals.



### 3. METHODOLOGY

*"Opening up to the unpredictability of in-depth interviewing can be difficult... It is precisely why we want to find out about the participant's lifeworld - rather than learn more about our own - that we need to throw ourselves into the unknown."*

(Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 65)

The purpose of this study was to explore how physical activity is experienced as a means for resilience and to reveal the defining characteristics and meaning of that experience. The fundamental research question was: what is the role of physical activity in young women's experiences of resilience in adolescence? This question assumed that individuals have unique perspectives and that there is an essence in their experience that is shared with others. Subsequent sections in this chapter will explain how this research question will be answered. This chapter will provide a description of the methodology utilized in this study. Basic paradigmatic beliefs and theoretical assumptions that have influenced this methodology will be explained. The chosen methods of in depth, semi-structured interviews and data analysis procedures will also be provided. Lastly, pertinent ethical considerations will be explored.

#### 3.1 Paradigmatic Assumptions & Methodology

This research study has basic paradigmatic beliefs and theoretical assumptions that have influenced the chosen methodology. Qualitative research is exploratory; it accepts the value of context and setting, and searches for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A qualitative research methodology is appropriate for the current research study because the aim is to explore human experiences. Since qualitative research involves interpretation in terms of the meanings people bring to experiences (Denzin & Lincoln,

2005), and the focus of this study is on understanding young women's experiences, qualitative research is an avenue well suited for this investigation.

This study falls under a constructivist paradigm because of the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying it. Constructivism holds that there is no objective truth waiting to be discovered; rather, meaning can only occur in relation to the mind, and therefore is a social construction (Crotty, 1998). The ontological assumptions, or how social reality is constructed and the nature of human existence, are declared through a constructivism standpoint (Creswell, 2003). This means that social phenomena and its meanings are created and revised by social actors (Grix, 2002). This study followed a constructivism standpoint; therefore, it is assumed that the young women who participated have created meanings in their experiences during adolescence with physical activity and resilience. Physical activity and resilience cannot be understood separately from the individual undergoing them; the experiences are connected to the individual and their unique worldview.

Epistemology refers to the philosophical questions about "*how* we can know and *what* we can know" (Coyle, 2007, p. 11). In this study, epistemological assumptions were understood through the perspective of hermeneutics. This term dates back to the late eighteenth century and has evolved to a major reference in qualitative inquiry as a basic characteristic of human existence; it means 'understanding' (Thomas, 2007). Gadamer (2004) explained hermeneutics as a philosophical approach, where the meaning in text is dependent on one's interpretations. Interpretivism, a related term, demonstrates that there are differences among people or objects and that one's interpretation must be grasped through the subjective context of each unique situation (Grix, 2002). In addition, it is assumed that humans are sense-making creatures whose accounts of experiences represent an attempt to make sense of those experiences (Smith,

Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This study was grounded in the assumption that each individual had personal understandings about their experiences with physical activity and resilience; therefore, I aimed to understand the essence of the individuals' experiences as opposed to trying to find causal relationships. My research was framed within a constructivist paradigm, heavily influenced by hermeneutics and interpretivism. I sought to uncover experiences in relation to phenomenon as opposed to changing, emancipating, or empowering individuals, as seen in critical research (Merriam, 2009). The knowledge gained was a social construction in that the participants created meanings based on their own perspectives.

Qualitative research seeks to understand an experiential phenomenon in terms of “what it is like” from the perspective of the participant (Fischer, 2006). A specific approach to qualitative research called phenomenology (Smith, 2003) was the methodology of choice for the current study. In this approach, the researcher aims to understand the “essence” or psychological meaning of the individual's experiences through investigating practiced examples of the phenomenon within the contexts of the participants' lives (Smith, 2003). In relation to this study, the phenomenon includes the constructs of physical activity and resilience. The participants' lived accounts or recollections form the perceptions and understandings of those constructs.

Phenomenological research is the study of experience. In phenomenological investigations, the ‘world in its appearing’ or how people perceive their world is emphasized (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). Phenomenology's roots in philosophy generate distinctive ontological and epistemological conceptions. Husserl (1927) discusses the human experience in relation to how individuals know their experiences; he was most interested in how they reflect with such depth and rigor that they are able to identify the essential qualities of that experience and that essence could be shared with others (as cited in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). ‘Intentionality’

is also a central component in phenomenology; it implies that the focus of any investigation should be on that which is between people, or between people and the world as opposed to seeing subjects and objects in isolation (Langdrige & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). Therefore, I approached this study with the assumption that the participants had an intentional relationship with the world. They had experiences unique to their standpoints; however the essence of those experiences could be shared with others who had similar experiences. A phenomenological position goes beyond the realism versus idealism debate and demonstrates an alternative way of seeing things where the emphasis is on the readily experienced world, not whether there is a “real” world or a world all in our minds (Langdrige & Hagger-Johnson, 2009).

The specific branch of phenomenology that was utilized in this study was Smith’s (2003) Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is a phenomenological research methodology because it is concerned with exploring individuals' experiences in their own terms (Smith et al., 2009). The goal in IPA is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social worlds, including the meanings particular experiences, events, and states hold for participants (Smith & Osborn, 2003). As IPA falls under phenomenological research, it is heavily influenced by hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). Although IPA relies on the process of the participants making sense of their world and their experiences, it is also recognized that the researcher or the analyst also shares in those interpretations (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). This shared practice of 'sense making' demonstrates the interpretative characteristics that inform IPA. Therefore, in relation to the current study, IPA required a double hermeneutic process (Smith et al., 2009), where I made sense of the participant who was making sense of their experiences with physical activity and resilience.

IPA was a suitable perspective to take with this research study because it was sensitive to the diversity of the human experience; the convergences and divergences within various accounts of an experience were accounted for (Eatough & Smith, 2008). It is important to recognize individual experiences in ways they are shared as well as the ways they differ. For example, IPA holds that individuals have different intersubjective experiences that are socially and historically contingent (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Analyses using IPA are idiographic as they focus on the distinct experiences of individuals; however, analyses also attempt to balance single accounts with what is shared by the group of participants (Reid et al., 2005). Essentially, each individual makes meaning of her experience in a unique way and it is important to bring forward the voice of that individual before generalizing her experience.

In addition, an IPA framework is an effective approach to use for this type of research because of its alliance with the cognitive paradigm in contemporary psychology (Smith & Osborn, 2003). As this study is focused on exploring personal experiences, social cognition and cognitive psychology played central roles in understanding the data. A person's experience is informed by her unique thoughts, which ultimately stem from her understanding of the world. Therefore one's perspective of an experience will influence her feelings and future actions. In this research study, understanding the participant's experience with physical activity and how it influenced her ability to be resilient allowed conclusions about their attributions and thought processes to also be drawn.

### 3.2 Method & Design

This section will focus on the manner in which I gathered the data for the current research study. The primary data collection strategy of in depth semi-structured interviews will be

explained. Next, the guiding interview questions will be discussed followed by how the data was be transcribed.

### 3.2.1 In Depth Semi-Structured Interviews

The focus of the study was on the individuals' lived experiences; therefore, in-depth interviews were the primary strategy utilized to understand the meaning of the experiences through the participants' own words (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Specifically, *semi-structured interviews* were the method of choice for this study, as recommended in IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This method allowed me to engage with the participant in a flexible dialogue. Although I had an initial set of questions to use as a guide, I was able to modify them and probe further as interesting ideas in the conversation emerged. A semi-structured interview format allowed me some freedom in how questions were asked and in what order. I was able to adapt questions on the spot, depending on the flow of the conversation and incorporate mini tour (focus on a specific aspect in detail) and structural (elicit understanding) questions to clarify or encourage elaboration by the participant (Shank, 2006). As I have training in counselling, I was also able to use important skills such as attending, paraphrasing, summarizing, and questioning (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2010), which helped me conduct the interviews in effective and sensitive ways.

The goal of the semi-structured interview in a phenomenological study is to enter the psychological and social world of the participant in order to understand their perspective (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Therefore, the participants were the experiential experts and I encouraged them to tell their stories in the interviews. Each participant had a shared role in the direction of the interviews. It was important that I didn't impose my ideas on the participant by asking leading questions during the interviews (Kvale, 1996). However, there were times when I gave prompts to participants because of the complexity of the issue or when the question was

perceived too vaguely by the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Ultimately, I aimed to have participants engaged in the process so I could understand their experiences. I worked with the participants collaboratively in order to identify and interpret the relevant meanings they used to make sense of their experiences (Reid, Flowers, Larkin, 2005). One to one interviews were the most appropriate to aid in this process because they were easily managed, allowed for rapport to be developed, and gave participants space to think, speak and be heard (Reid et al., 2005).

### 3.2.2 Interview Questions

Questions that guided the interviews were constructed in an open-ended manner so that the participants were encouraged to explain and elaborate their understandings of the topic. I used the method of *funneling* where I asked broad questions initially and then narrowed the questions to probe specific issues which allowed me to understand the participant's worldview (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This method allowed me to understand the depth of the participant's experiences. An interview guide was developed for the current study, which indicated the topics and their sequence in the interview (Kvale, 1996). The interview guide provided consistency between interviews so that research participants were guided through the same topics. To follow the semi-structured interview approach, the interview guide contained an outline of topics to be covered, with suggested questions (Kvale, 1996). Refer to appendix A for the detailed interview guide.

To determine the format, initial questions, and additional questions for the interview, I conducted a pilot study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) with two peers prior to formal data collection. Participants in the pilot study were asked questions in the format of the interview guide (Appendix A). I practiced the whole interview process, including informed consent, research questions and informal member checking and debriefing. During debriefing with these individuals, I asked them for guidance in revising the format of the selected questions and my

performance as an interviewer. This helped me revise questions so that the interview flowed well and encouraged in depth personal accounts. In hindsight, I believe I could have interviewed a couple more participants in the process of my pilot study. I remember feeling overly anxious during my first interview. It is important in qualitative research for the interviewer to know the interview guide well in advance of the first interview so they are not referring to it repeatedly during the interview. This can be distracting for both the participant and the interviewer. The anxiety within the interviewer can transfer to the participant, making them feel less comfortable; therefore, they are not as likely to provide in depth experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As a new researcher, this was a valuable lesson to learn. I will do more preparation through pilot studies in future research.

### 3.2.3 Data Transcription

In IPA, it is recommended that interviews be audio recorded because it is too difficult to write down everything the participants are saying while maintaining rapport with them (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In this study, interviews were audio-recorded with two password-protected iPhones, to ensure there was a back up in case one recording did not work. After the interviews, I immediately transferred the data to my password-protected computer. Then I transcribed the interviews, including the questions I asked and the participants' responses (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I did the majority of the transcribing; however, I also had help from research assistants who signed confidentiality agreements (Appendix B), which ensured they would not discuss the data with anyone other than me. Transcribing the data was a crucial step in IPA because the text was later broken down into themes and clusters (Smith & Osborn, 2003). All interviews were transcribed at the semantic level, where all words were recorded including, false starts, significant pauses, and laughs (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I found it helpful to have assistants, who



knew my research, to look at the data. The support I received from them contributed to the trustworthiness of the study as all the transcripts were double checked for accuracy (Creswell, 2009). Having assistants also allowed me an opportunity to debrief and discuss preliminary findings or reflections with individuals who could give me constructive feedback.

### 3.3 Participants

This research study explored the experiences of young women who utilized physical activity as a means for resilience during adolescence. In order to reach this objective, a purposeful sampling procedure (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010) was utilized to select participants because the research questions needed to be significant to them in order to gain meaningful data (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This method allowed me to find key informants who had special knowledge and an emic perspective on the phenomenon being studied; thus, they were able to contribute rich information to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Therefore, there was specific selection criteria utilized to determine who was eligible to participate in the current research study. Refer to Appendix C for the recruitment poster.

Participants in the current research study met the following criteria:

- Female between the ages of 18 and 25
- Experienced adversity (negative uncontrollable life circumstances such as poverty, discrimination, disability, stress, trauma, deprivation, oppression, prejudice, inadequate parenting, family violence)
- Defined selves as physically active throughout adolescence
- Participated in at least one physical activity (in the form sport or exercise) on a regular basis throughout adolescence.

- Believe physical activity was a meaningful method for managing adversity or difficult life circumstances during adolescence
- Considered self "resilient"
- Were willing to participate in an one on one interview (1hr length), member checking, and a follow up conversation about the data (2hrs total)

### 3.3.1 Participant Selection

The key selection criteria included the age, gender, physical activity, adversity, and resiliency characteristics of the research participants. Research participants recruited for this study were 'young women' between the ages of 18 and 25, this ensured that they transitioned or were in the process of transitioning from adolescence (Lerner, Brown, & Kier, 2005). As adolescence was recently experienced, they were generally able to reflect on that time of their lives and could associate meaning with the activities they participated in.

Participants in the study defined themselves as physically active. The construct of physical activity has been shown to mean different things to children, adolescents, and adults (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006; Carless & Douglas, 2010; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Lenkerd, 2010; MacDougall, Schiller, & Darbyshire; Murphy, 2010). In reviewed research, there were limited studies that explored how young women reflected on the meaning of physical activity in adolescence from their standpoint as adults. This research study provided insight into the perspectives of individuals who have lived what they understand to be a physically active lifestyle in adolescence. Participants in this research study also participated in at least one physical activity regularly and voluntarily in their leisure time throughout adolescence. This ensured that they had experiences with physical activity outside of physical education classes to discuss with me (Brookes & Magnusson, 2007). For the purposes of this study, physical

activities included anything that makes individuals' sweat or breathe hard such as sports, dance, yoga, biking, martial arts, or exercise training (Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, 2011).

Participants in this study also had undergone adversity or significantly difficult and uncontrollable internal and/or external life circumstances in which their participation in physical activity contributed to their abilities to be resilient. Adversity can be experienced in the community, the family, or personally and examples include but are not limited to poverty, discrimination, disability, stress, trauma, deprivation, oppression, prejudice, inadequate parenting, and family violence (Lee, Cheung & Kwong, 2011; Luthar, & Cicchetti, 2000; Gitterman, 1991; Willms, 2002). Resilience occurs when individuals negotiate, adapt and manage adversity (Windle, 2011). Participants in this research study believed that physical activity played a meaningful role in their ability to be resilient.

This study involved four participants. This is a reasonable sample size for a phenomenological research study because it provides enough cases to examine similarities and differences between participants without producing an overwhelming amount of data (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I strived to have participants vary in terms of their demographic characteristics so that I could provide a wide range of perspectives and increase the soundness of the findings and interpretations obtained through this study (Polkinghorne, 1989 as cited in Langdridge, et al., 2009). In addition, the participants were able to understand their involvement in the research process, give consent, engage with the interviewer, and were willing to express their experiences and opinions (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). The time commitment on behalf of the participants was approximately one hour for the initial data collection and an additional hour for member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) the data. A \$30 gift card for Lululemon was given to the participants for their time and knowledge.

### 3.3.2 Participant Recruitment

I advertised at local organizations and community centers in Saskatchewan where physical activity was promoted in youth and adults. Advertisements were also put in places that were likely to have high populations of young adults including campus settings. The majority of the participants who volunteered found the posting in the physical activity center (PAC) at the University of Saskatchewan. I did not experience any troubles recruiting participants for this study. Approximately ten candidates volunteered, of which I screened via email and telephone conversations. In the conversations we went over the selection criteria and the participants briefly explained to me how they met the criteria. The age, physical activity, and gender portions of the selection criteria were straightforward and it was easy to identify whether participants qualified in those areas. However, it was more difficult for the participants and me to determine if they met the criteria for the adversity piece. Some potential participants did not further respond to email interactions after I queried them about the adversity they experienced; other participants who I conversed with on the phone felt they misunderstood the poster after we discussed the adversity requirements. I believe that this confusion was due to the fact that adversity can be interpreted in many ways. In hindsight, I could have included examples about what adversity is on the research poster. I chose not to do this in my proposal because I thought it was too much information for my research poster and was something that would be better addressed in a verbal discussion after they decided they were interested.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

In phenomenological studies, the researcher analyzes data by finding significant statements and then grouping them into "meaning units," with the goal of producing an in-depth description of the phenomenon by developing themes of meanings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In the

present study, data was analyzed following IPA guidelines, which is a branch of phenomenological research. It is an assumption in IPA, that the analyst is interested in learning something about the participant's psychological world (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Data analysis in IPA requires the researcher and the participant to be involved in the meaning making process, ensuring authenticity of the data (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). I was interested in understanding the experiences of the participants and how they have come to understand and make meaning of those experiences. These understandings and meanings were not accessible on the surface of the transcript; therefore a thorough interpretive process was necessary. IPA is not a prescriptive approach to data analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The flexibility and dynamic qualities of IPA make it well suited for understanding complex psychological experiences.

IPA is an idiographic approach, meaning that cases are analyzed first individually before any generalizations are made (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This idiographic approach allowed me to analyze the data in depth and avoid jumping to naïve assumptions and conclusions. A key commitment of IPA is that analysis should be developed around substantial verbatim excerpts from the data, which illustrates the participant's voice in this type of research (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). The general rules and guidelines of IPA research helped me initially develop an "insider's perspective" as well as an interpretive account of the meanings the participants attribute to their experiences (Reid et al., 2005). Therefore there was a balance of 'emic' and 'etic' positions in the data analysis. In the 'emic' position, I began to hear people's stories and prioritized their worldviews at the core of the account; whereas in the 'etic' position, I attempted to make sense of the participants' experiences and illuminated them in ways that answered the research questions (Reid et al., 2005). These positions were achieved through a detailed process of coding, organizing, integrating, and interpreting of data (Reid et al., 2005). I applied six stages

of analysis to the current study: reading for meaning, identifying themes, structuring themes, producing a summary table, integrating cases, and writing up of the analysis.

In stage one, reading for meaning, I read and then re-read the first transcript noting thoughts, reflections, and observations about the meaning of the text in the right hand margin. It was important for me to read and re-read the single transcript many times because each reading lead to new insights and allowed me to become very familiar with the account (Smith & Osborn, 2003). There were no rules about what was commented on in this stage. Comments were attempts at summarizing, paraphrasing, and finding associations, connections, similarities, contradictions, or preliminary interpretations (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I read and re-read the transcript recording comments emphasizing the areas of: descriptive (described context of what the participant said and the subject of the talk within the transcript), linguistic (explored the specific use of language by the participant), and conceptual (engaged at a more interrogative and conceptual level). I coded these observations with data analysis charts in a word document. Descriptive comments were noted in regular text; linguistic comments were noted in italic; and conceptual comments were underlined. These analytic tools helped me immerse myself in the participant's life world and engage deeply in data analysis (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009).

In stage two, identifying themes, I drew out patterns of meaning in the text and recorded them in the left hand margin of the transcript in the data analysis chart I created with word. At this stage it was tempting for me to impose my assumptions and beliefs on the text; therefore, it was imperative for me to bracket my preconceptions as much as possible (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). I continuously looked at the data inductively so that themes emerged as opposed to looking for themes I expected to find. At this point, my initial notes were transformed into concise phrases with the purpose of capturing the essential quality of what the text revealed

(Smith & Osborn, 2003). Although this stage was more abstract than the initial stage and it invoked more psychological terminology, it was still pertinent to uncover what the participants actually said in their own words. Therefore, it took great effort to find expressions that allowed theoretical connections within and across cases, which were still grounded in the particularity of the specific idea being expressed in the transcript (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

In stage three, structuring themes, I listed themes, looked for relationships between them and structured them into clusters or subordinate themes. At this point, the entire transcript was treated as data, and no attempt was made to omit or select passages for special attention (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I reviewed the transcripts and recordings to make sure I was interpreting the essence and meaning for the participant and not going beyond the data (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). I listed the emergent themes and looked for connections between them in an attempt to make sense of the data. Some themes emerged together as sub themes and others emerged as superordinate concepts (Smith & Osborn, 2003). At this point I found it helpful to have a print of the transcripts and code them. I colored the data with different colored pencil crayons that related to each theme. I also numbered each page and line of the transcript.

In stage four, producing a summary table of themes, I summarized the themes and clusters along with quotations to illustrate them. Each cluster was given a name to represent the superordinate theme. The table listed the cluster of themes under the superordinate theme. An identifier was included behind each phrase on the list to aid in organization and to facilitate finding the original source (Smith et al., 2009). The identifier was key words from the passage, or quotations, as well as page, and line numbers. Some themes were dropped at this phase of the analysis process because they lacked relevance, did not fit with the emerging structure, or were not very rich in evidence (Smith & Osborn, 2003). At this point, I continued the analysis with

other cases by repeating the above steps with transcripts from other participants (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I started from the beginning of each transcript, respecting the individuality of the each participant's story. Although I was aiming to find shared experiences, I made sure to recognize differences and refrained from making generalizations too early in the data analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

In stage five, integrating cases, I integrated findings and produced a final table of superordinate themes for the entire data set (Smith & Johnson, 2003). I needed to prioritize the data and begin to reduce it. Factors such as prevalence and richness guided me as I narrowed down the most critical themes. The goal was to capture the meanings of the phenomena as perceived by multiple participants (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). In this stage, I found it helpful to physically cut out sections of data from the transcripts and paste them on posters that identified each sub theme. At this point I was readily able to see convergences and divergences emerge between the participants' stories and experiences. I could also see the connections between sub themes and how they merged to form superordinate themes.

Writing up the data was also a part of the analysis, as ideas were expanded at this point. I moved from the final themes in stage five to a write up and final statement outlining the meanings inherent in the participants' experiences (Smith & Johnson, 2003). I translated the themes into narrative accounts based off the final table, with quotes from the participants to illustrate the essence of the experiences. It was important for me distinguish my analysis from the words of the participants. To present the data, I included the emergent thematic analysis in the 'results' section and then linked the analysis with the literature in the 'discussion' section (Smith & Johnson, 2003).



### 3.5 Trustworthiness

*Trustworthiness* refers to the goodness or overall quality of the data gathered in the current qualitative research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Trustworthiness is achieved in qualitative research when the data collected is applicable, consistent, and neutral (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). There are several critical things that need to be done in order to produce and interpret sound data. These procedures align with a typical constructivist approach. The constructivist approach uses terms such as *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* to determine the trustworthiness of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, procedures in these categories will be referred to in the following discussion of trustworthiness.

The first concept used in qualitative research to determine the quality of the research is credibility; this is achieved when the participants and setting of a study are accurately described (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). Participants in this study met specific selection criteria to ensure that meaningful data was generated. Member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the process of sharing data and interpretations with participants, was utilized to enhance credibility. Throughout the interviews, I checked in with participants to ensure I was interpreting their perspectives in the ways they intended. I also showed them the transcripts from interview one before we proceeded to interview two. This gave them the opportunity to reflect on the data and withdraw or alter quotes. The goal of member checking was to ensure that voices of the participants and their experiences were prevalent in understanding the research questions. In addition I attempted to triangulate (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) my findings with other research to strengthen conclusions. I utilized the method of peer debriefing (Marshall & Rossman, 2011)

with my advisor, committee members, and research assistants. This allowed me to reflect and determine if my personal bias was affecting the credibility of the data.

Secondly, the concept of transferability, or whether the results have the potential to be transferred to other settings was important for me to consider so I could produce good qualitative research (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). The initial purposeful sampling strategy, in which I selected participants of various demographic characteristics, contributed to the transferability of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is assumed in phenomenological research that there are shared experiences of phenomenon (Van Manen, 2001); therefore, having a wide range of perspectives to verify a consensus of experiences is desirable. In addition, I obtained a thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the participants, their backgrounds, and the interview setting to enable someone interested in applying the data to different circumstances. I protected the participant's anonymity by removing identifying information out of the report.

The last important concepts in qualitative research that I used were dependability and confirmability. Dependability addresses the quality of the data in terms of how the researcher deals with changes in the research process; whereas confirmability addresses whether another person can place faith in the results (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). Phenomenological research honors the first person perspective and aims to describe one's accounts or perceptions of the world as well as understand the meanings and essences of experiences (Smith, 2003). In order to achieve this, I engaged in bracketing (Fischer, 2009), or abstaining my presuppositions about the items under investigation. As noted by my motivation in approaching this area of research, I had potential biases about the current study that were inescapable. As the researcher, I was essentially an instrument in this study and influenced how the data was interpreted. In order to counter and make evident my preconceived ideas, I kept a journal where I noted my

assumptions, expectations, and interpretations before and after the interview process. This increased my personal self-awareness and openness (Ashworth, 2003). I kept records of how my method evolved based on the interview process. For example, I reflected in my journal about how the interviews were adapted based on the responses of specific participants. This journal provided evidence and contributed to the dependability and confirmability of data set and analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

My personal position was important to acknowledge and reflect upon. As a reflexive researcher, I engaged in the continuous process of bracketing (Fischer, 2009) in all stages of the research process. I could not use bracketing with the hopes of being entirely objective because I don't believe it is possible for a person to be completely impartial with the data. Instead, bracketing served me in the sense that I could acknowledge my engagement in the development of the consensual understanding of the research phenomenon (Fischer, 2009). I understood that my perspective was evident in the analysis of the data. Bracketing allowed me to identify my personal bias and preconceived notions so that I could examine them. I was able to be reflexive and could look at the data in a self-aware manner (Fischer, 2009). I repeatedly looked at the data, keeping my own assumptions in mind, so that I could determine if I was imposing meanings on the data or letting meanings emerge. This reflexivity is pertinent to any phenomenological research because one aims to understand experiences from the perspective of the participants. It is important to acknowledge the double hermeneutic process that occurs and that it is impossible to be completely objective when interpreting data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Phenomenological research implies that the researcher plays a participatory role in the meaning making process (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Prioritizing member checking, engaging in bracketing and reflexivity

with a researcher journal, and using caution when analyzing the data, contributed to a trustworthy research study.

### 3.6 Ethics

Ethics approval for the current research study was sought for through the University of Saskatchewan. This study initially received approval on March 8, 2013. Shortly after receiving approval I interviewed participant one. At this point I became aware that I had made a small oversight in my research protocol. Initially, my transcript release form had participants' sign that they had gone over their transcripts from their interviews with me; and the form was to be signed in the second interview when I gave them the incentive. This was not possible because I would not be able to get them the transcripts from interview two during interview two. I explored other options such as emailing them the transcripts from both interviews and the transcript release form and then having them sign the form and return it via email or I would pick it up. However, I felt this was asking too much of the participant after the interviews had already been done and they had received the incentive. I realized I had to resubmit to ethics to revise my forms so that I would not lose data and the exchange of information between the participants and me would be easier. The forms were amended through ethics on June 2nd, 2013. At this point, I also had a change of supervisors from Audrey Kinzel to Tim Claypool. My former supervisor, Audrey Kinzel resigned from her position at the University of Saskatchewan effective June 28, 2013.

This study involved human beings as research subjects; therefore, the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2010) guided how the research was conducted. The most relevant sections of the document in relation to this study were Free and Informed Consent as well as Privacy and Confidentiality. The individuals involved in this study were all competent to give their own consent, as they provided retrospective accounts of their

experiences in adolescence from their stance in young adulthood. Participants were provided with an information sheet, including the purpose of the study, main interview questions, previous research, and the researcher's qualifications. The informed consent process was interactive to ensure the participants understood the potential benefits and risks of becoming involved in the research study. Informed consent was continuous throughout the duration of the research process; even after the consent form was signed. The participants were encouraged to ask questions and were aware that they were able to withdraw their data at anytime up until the thesis had been defended and the data was collated.

The nature of this research presented minimal risk to the participants. It was possible that participants could experience emotional distress as they discussed sensitive issues from their past. Therefore, I ensured to carefully debrief participants after the interviews to make certain they were emotionally stable and did not require additional counselling support. Member checking was an interactive process with the participants to ensure authenticity of their accounts and that there were no misrepresentations in the findings. I did this by checking in with them during the initial interview by paraphrasing and questioning them at a deeper level to elicit understanding. In addition, I sent them the transcripts from the first interview so they would have a chance to add, alter, or delete information as well as reflect on the content of the interview. In the second interview, we further discussed the themes that emerged from the first interview to further reinforce member checking. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms were used and certain identifying details were masked in the data and findings.

### 3.7 Summary

In summary, the current study utilized a constructivist approach, informed by hermeneutics, interpretivism, and phenomenology. Specifically, Smith's Interpretative Phenomenological

Analysis (IPA) was the chosen data analysis strategy. Semi-structured interviews were the chosen method for data collection and a purposeful sampling strategy was implemented to recruit participants. The data generated in this study is trustworthy for several reasons including member checking and peer debriefing. I obtained ethics approval from the University of Saskatchewan and made sure to consider ethical issues such as informed consent and possible risks to the participants during the research process.

## 4. RESULTS

*“You have to have a real love of your sport to carry you through all the bad times...you must have a commitment to work hard and to never give up.”*

- Nancy Greene, Canadian Champion Alpine Skier (CAAWS, n.d.)

The purpose of this research was to explore how physical activity is experienced as a means for resilience and the defining characteristics and the meaning of those experiences for young women. The main research question that guided this study was: what is the role of physical activity in young women's experiences of resilience? The data was analyzed utilizing IPA and is represented thematically throughout this chapter; themes and sub-themes were generated inductively with the participant's own words (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Excerpts illustrating the participant's experiences were edited for the sake of coherency and anonymity. I altered the text with ellipses (...) where there was dialogue that did not relate to the phenomenon being explored. The text was also altered if it provided information that could identify the participants. Words that were repeated and used as filler (i.e. yeah, ahh, you know) were also omitted. Lastly, words that I added in the sake of context for the reader are indicated by square parenthesis (American Psychological Association, 2010). Throughout this chapter, the individual participant voices were maintained to be consistent with the idiographic approach recommended for IPA research (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). In the following sections, a brief introduction to each participant will be provided followed by a discussion of their understandings of the role physical activity played in their stories of resilience.

### 4.1 Contextualizing the Data

In IPA research, the primary concern is to provide detailed accounts of the in-depth experiences of individuals; later in the analysis process it is expected that a shared essence of the

participants lived experiences will be revealed (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The four women chosen to participate in this study came from similar backgrounds. They were university students at the time of the interview, experienced a form of adversity in adolescence, and had generally positive relationships with physical activity that continued into adulthood. They also had unique and divergent experiences with adversity, physical activity, and resilience. The participants who volunteered ranged in age from 18 to 21; therefore, their experiences in adolescence were recent, which enhanced the validity of their recollections. Most participants did not identify with being labeled as "at risk," a term frequently utilized in the resilience literature; however, they all shared stories of adversity that were significant to them. *Adversity* is conceptualized in the literature as risk factors, negative life circumstances or individual characteristics that are statistically associated with adjustment difficulties or poor outcomes in one's future development (Luthar, & Cicchetti, 2000; Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009). The adversities that the participants experienced during adolescence differed in nature; however, they converged as they were collectively deemed adverse and remained outside of the participants' control. For example, some participants experienced internal adversities while others experienced external adversities.

In the literature, it is identified that individuals exposed to adversity must have protective factors readily available. This includes biological, psychological, and environmental processes that modify, ameliorate, or alter an individual's response to environmental stressors that would otherwise predispose her to maladaptive outcomes (Gitterman, 1991; Rutter, 1990; Rutter, 1985). Prior research has identified that physical activity can provide a medium for adolescents to access external and internal protective factors and therefore assist them in effectively managing adversity (Goodman, 1999; Martinek & Hellison, 1997). The participants in this study discussed



the role and impact of their experiences with physical activity and how it helped them manage the adversities they were exposed to during adolescence.

All participants in this study identified themselves as resilient; however, they conceptualized the meaning of resilience with different perspectives. In the literature, the final condition for resilience research is the attainment of positive adaptation or outcomes despite the presence of adversity. Positive adaptation can be conceptualized and achieved in various ways such as having an absence of psychopathology or low levels of negative symptoms, maintaining competence or returning to normal functioning, or thriving and flourishing (Windle, 2011). In words most relevant to the present study, resilience emerges through individual experiences and their journeys to defining themselves as healthy despite adverse conditions (Ungar, 2004b). This rest of this section will serve to introduce the participants and briefly describe their accounts with the constructs of physical activity and resilience.

#### 4.1.1 Rochelle

The first participant to be interviewed was Rochelle. At the time of the interview, Rochelle was a 21-year old, full-time university student enrolled in a health related college. Throughout her adolescence, she participated in variety of physical activities including competitive figure skating and school sports such as volleyball, basketball, badminton, and track and field events. She expressed a strong enjoyment of physical activity throughout adolescence. She maintained this passion into adulthood where she continued to skate recreationally, participate in campus recreation teams and marathon running. When she was in mid adolescence, her father passed away. She utilized physical activities, specifically running and skating, as ways to relieve stress during that time. In addition, Rochelle shared experiences of being bullied in school and how physical activity served as a mechanism for her to escape those challenges.

Rochelle had an extensive knowledge about physical activity as evidenced in her academic background. When asked about physical activity, she replied "physical activity: anything that involves... moving... or... sport or just getting up and going for walks... being active!" According to Rochelle, the meaning of physical activity was part of her personal and family identity. "I grew up in a fairly active family... when we were little we were raised to be active... as soon as I could walk I was doing... activity." In addition, physical activity served as an important way to deal with stress for Rochelle. "I used [physical activity] when I was stressed or upset. I would just go and run... that's how I manage stress now... [Physical activity] is my outlet."

In our discussion about risk and resilience, Rochelle provided valuable insights. She explained resilience as "a willingness to continue doing what you're doing and if something doesn't go the way you planned, you overcome that obstacle or that barrier." She clarified that she did not mean ignorant compliance: "I don't mean like hitting your head against the wall... but finding a way to achieve the goals you set out to obtain... no matter what comes up in your path." In relation to risk, Rochelle was hesitant to identify with being labeled "at risk": "I wouldn't want to be called that or generalized that way." Rather, Rochelle related risk to adversity as a learning process. "If you're a resilient person or even if you learn to be resilient... You [get] used to dealing with things not going perfectly so you are creative or you figure out some way to overcome [adversity]." Rochelle's responses showed resilience as a dynamic process, involving adaptation, problem solving, and perseverance.

#### 4.1.2 Jennifer

Jennifer was the second participant whom I interviewed. She was 18 years old at the time of the interview and enrolled full time in a variety of first year courses. In adolescence, she participated in a variety of sports and activities; however, she connected most with running.

Jennifer was still very active at the time of the interview as she was competing at a varsity level. Like Rochelle, Jennifer always found sport and physical activity to be a positive outlet when she felt stressed. Jennifer was diagnosed with Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) when she was in adolescence. She found that physical activity, specifically running, helped her escape the stresses of a regular school setting and allowed her to make friends easier.

In our discussion about physical activity, Jennifer expressed a general and positive understanding of the concept. "I [think physical activity is] a good thing. Even if you're not good at it... it is a really important thing to have in your life. I find it releases stress." Further, she elaborated that physical activity helped her develop positively: "[physical activity] gave me strength in some areas of life... it was a way to get out of your regular self... its just a lot of fun and you get to know people." According to Jennifer, resilience meant "staying strong... putting the past behind you... [as well as] individually being focused on the future and... what you are doing in the present." In relation to the adversity she experienced in adolescence (living with SAD), she expressed how important it was to move forward. "It just... doesn't matter about your past... you can work from that and you can become your own person."

#### 4.1.3 Terra

The third participant I interviewed was Terra. She was a 21-year old, full-time university student at the time of the interview. She was enrolled in a health related college and her career aspirations were in the field of health and physical activity. She defined herself as very physically active in adolescence, participating in a variety of sports including volleyball, track, basketball, and badminton; however, she was most passionate about soccer where she competed at national levels during adolescence. Terra experienced adversity in her interpersonal

relationships as she was bullied frequently and intensely throughout adolescence. She felt that she was able to manage this adversity through succeeding in sport.

Terra talked about physical activity with great enthusiasm and passion. She described physical activity as serving two different purposes in her life. "[Physical activity is] either going out and... having fun.... going out for bike rides or Frisbee... but there is also that competitive aspect where even if the environment is not as competitive, I am competitive with myself." Terra felt that her relationship with physical activity played an important component in her general approach to life. "I think it shaped who I am today... I've used that competitiveness within all aspects of my life... with my job... school... trying to be the best I can."

In our conversation about resilience, Terra explained how it involves a deep desire to keep moving forward and persevering. "Resilience [is] like hard work and never giving up, just being persistent despite what has happened." She further elaborated in terms of resilience being relevant in sport, such as continuing to pursue a goal or make a team, even when one is faced with setbacks. I was curious about how she perceived resilience in the context of sport because in my research question, I was concerned about how resilience is obtained in the context of one's personal life. In our second interview, I followed up with her to understand more what she meant. She enlightened me that sport and life are often one in the same when you are an athlete. "I think it is very similar. I know there is times in your life where things don't go the way you want them, just like in sport. Maybe you're down a couple points [or] you're not playing your best... if you got that end goal, you just have to keep going for it." The lessons and experiences one has through sport often align with each other. "I parallel the two very much so. Lots of things that I learned through sport, I use with my life and lots of things in life that my parents taught me... helped me [with] sport."

#### 4.1.4 Carly

The final participant I interviewed was Carly. She was a 21-year old, full-time university student enrolled in a health related college. Throughout her adolescence, Carly defined her self as physically active. She reported participating in ballet throughout her childhood and that the amount of time she spent dancing significantly increased after her parents divorced, when she was at the brink of adolescence. The adversity of living through a divorce in adolescence resulted in Carly experiencing internal battles including poor self-esteem and depression. Doing an intense ballet class was always her way of getting her mind off things that were bothering her. It was a positive way to express the emotions that built up for which she had no other outlet.

Carly expressed having a meaningful relationship with physical activity, specifically dance. When queried about her experiences with dance, she explained: "[Dance] was always a place to go that was welcoming... it was a really positive atmosphere. It helped me make a lot of friends... [Dance] was something I was actually good at and could work towards." She felt similar benefits when she would ride her bike. "Riding my bike I did a lot of... it was peaceful and quiet... it would let me get my thoughts in order." However, dance was the physical activity she associated most with managing the adversity she experienced in her life. "I didn't really want to spend a lot of time at home [during the divorce] so [dance was] my home away from home where people didn't ask questions... and there wasn't arguing." Carly expressed how dance was a strategy to manage adversity; it had the power to alter her disposition or outlook on life: "I was always in a much better mood coming home from dance than I was going to dance."

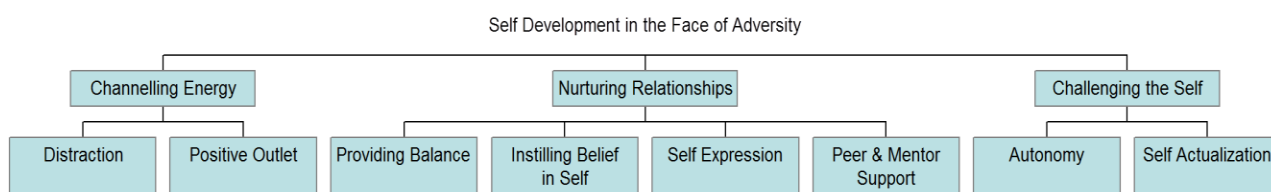
#### 4.2 The Role of Physical Activity in Young Women's Experiences of Resilience

The data produced through this study was full of rich perspectives on the role of physical activity in young women's experiences of resilience. In the initial stages of data analysis, I

noticed countless subthemes. As analysis progressed, some subthemes were eliminated that lacked in relevance and others merged together. I noticed similarities between subthemes so that they formed clusters or higher order "superordinate" themes. In the final stage of analysis, three superordinate themes remained, tied together by an overarching theme. Figure 4-1 provides a schematic representation of the superordinate themes and sub-themes.

Figure 4-1 The Role of Physical Activity in Young Women's Experiences of Resilience

#### During Adolescence: Overview of Themes and Subthemes



The overarching theme of *self-development in the face of adversity* emerged as a common component among the other themes. The participants in this study described their journeys towards managing adversity and achieving health and wellness as a process influenced through the superordinate themes of: *channeling energy*, *nurturing relationships*, and *challenging the self*. The sub-themes of distraction and positive outlet merged to form the theme of *channeling energy*. The sub-themes included under the second superordinate theme of *nurturing relationships* included: providing balance, instilling belief in self, self expression, as well as peer and mentor support. Lastly, the participants identified that *challenging the self* was a superordinate theme directly related to the role of physical activity in managing adversity. *Challenging the self* was made up of the sub-themes: autonomy as well as self actualization. In the following sections, I will explain the themes that emerged and how they are interconnected.

#### 4.2.1 Self Development in the Face of Adversity

"I worked on my stuff [and] myself through [dance]" Carly explained in a conversation about the purpose of dance in her experiences coping with adversity. In each participant's story, a specific activity or sport served as a refuge where they could work on themselves and continue to grow despite the chaos and havoc they were experiencing in their outside worlds. For Carly, dance served that purpose. "I ended up starting... doing some choreography for myself... I started to put my own emotions into my own work. I started creating things in dance." Dance was a powerful tool for self development, expression, and growth from Carly's perspective:

I always really enjoyed spending time in [the studio] doing my own movements because then it really was me speaking to a whole room of people without having to say anything and I could pick a song that described exactly what I was feeling at the time and show exactly what I was feeling from a certain moment and that really helped.

Dance helped her express her feelings in an authentic and individual manner. It facilitated her to sort things out and move forward in her own personal journey despite the things she couldn't control at home or at school.

In Terra's story, she identified that soccer provided a means for her to develop into who she is today. "It was a good experience. I don't think I would be who I am today if I didn't work through and continue in sport." She talked about many of the social challenges she found fitting in on a team in addition to how tough the sport was physically and mentally. Terra elaborated that things could have been different if she did not have soccer. She discussed how it was not uncommon to fall in with the wrong crowd or start using drugs if one dropped out of sport. She found her experiences with soccer made her stronger and helped her navigate through hardships in adolescence. With a hint of relief she declared that "as tough as some of those times were... I

am so glad it was just soccer kind of problems, not really life problems." Her perspective made me think that soccer provided her a place where it was safer to feel pressure and sometimes fail or make mistakes than in other areas of life with more severe consequences. It allowed her to learn and grow while ultimately avoiding less desirable life outcomes.

Rochelle's journey towards positive development in the face of adversity was facilitated with physical activity and sport. "If I wasn't involved in sport... I have no idea what I would have done." Rochelle talked about how things felt so disconnected at home after her dad passed away, to the point where home was often uncomfortable. She iterated a few times during our conversations that physical activity and sport provided her a necessary break from the disarray she felt at home. It was soothing to have something normal amongst the vast and unfamiliar emptiness at home. In her words, sport afforded her "a chance to take a step back" from the void of her dad, her mother's grief and indifference, as well as how unsettled her brother was. When she traveled with her basketball team, she was able to "take a mini vacation... [and have] a chance to get away from home and take a little bit of a breather from the people coming and going and mom being different than she was before." She further explained in our conversation that at that specific point of her adolescence, when her father passed, sport provided her an opportunity to feel normal. In turn, this enabled the resources she needed to continue to move forward through such a difficult time in her development.

Jennifer's experience living with SAD in adolescence made it especially difficult to build the positive social relationships associated with this crucial time of development. She commented:

[Physical activity] gave me strength in some areas of life... especially when I was younger. I loved gym class because it was just a way to get out of your regular self and



recess too, like if you're just playing soccer too or something... it's just a lot of fun, you get to know people.

Jennifer elaborated that she was talented when it came to being active; she had skills that others admired and that gave her more confidence. She enlightened me about what living with SAD was like and how physical activity helped her: "[it] wasn't like normal shyness, it was really bad... [Physical activity] helped out quite a bit." She explained how she was really scared to even talk to people and that she struggled with poor self image and esteem. Physical activity aided in her development because in her words, "when you're so shy like I was... it's a good way of getting out of your shell." Physical activity also allowed her to have fun and feel joy; feelings which became fewer and farther between in the rougher points of Jennifer's adolescence. Jennifer commented on how becoming more active again, like she was as a kid, was revitalizing after going through an emotional slump in adolescence. "I remember being happy... being in track, in running back when I was a kid so I was like okay you should do this again." She associated that time of childhood with joyfulness, without worrying so much about what others think; physical activity allowed her to find her way through the isolation she felt in adolescence and eventually connect with others and feel pleasure and optimism again like she did when she was younger.

The themes that emerged in the participant's stories described how physical activity helped them develop themselves positively despite the adversities they endured in adolescence. Specifically, the superordinate themes of: *channeling energy*, *nurturing relationships*, and *challenging the self* emerged as the methods in which physical activity influenced the participants' resilience. Themes will be presented in the following sections that illustrate the intricate details of how physical activity served as a mechanism for resilience. Despite the

adversities they endured, the participants all shared stories of strength and commitment to move forward while achieving health, wellness, and excellence in their lives.

#### 4.2.2 Channeling Energy

Throughout the interviews and data analysis process, I noticed a common theme emerge regarding how these young women utilized physical activity as a means to manage adversity in the urgency of the given situation. In the language and wording of the participants, "channeling" or "releasing" energy was a common thread linking their individual experiences. They expressed how this method of managing adversity with physical activity followed them into adulthood. For example, Terra shared: "I feel like sport was a way for me to just go and release that energy and release any stress that I had so now... if I have a tough day at work I can really just channel that energy and go out for a run."

Each participant generally had different experiences with the types of activities they channeled their energy into; however, they all experienced elements of the distraction and positive outlet sub themes that formed the superordinate theme of *channeling energy*. All of the participants, particularly Terra and Jennifer, referred frequently to *channeling energy* as a method of immediately dealing with the stress or upset related to the uncontrollable adversity in their lives. "I will go to the track and just let everything go" Jennifer explained in a conversation about how physical activity impacted her life. She commented further that physical activity is like a vent in the sense that it "puts your energy towards something."

##### 4.2.2.1 Distraction

The immediate reactions that the participants demonstrated were similar despite the array of adversities they experienced individually. For example, they shared feelings of anger, upset, confusion, stress or sadness during difficult times in adolescence. They also expressed a sense of

urgency to deal with these emotions. Physical activity was immediately available to them during those hard times and often served as a way to level their emotions, think about something else, and find instant relief. As Terra iterated: "when I go out onto the soccer field... it's just a way to... block everything out and really be that stress relief." Rochelle shared some of the same struggles with relationships and bullying from other girls as Terra did. Both girls referred to the "girl drama" they experienced in high school. Physical activity often served as a respite from those theatrics. "I didn't spend as much time with my school friends as everybody else did." Rochelle said in our first interview. "I was at the rink all the time so I stayed away... I liked being out of all that girl drama... it was like an escape." With a mischievous chuckle, she continued that it was like "I don't have to deal with your guys' crap!" Rochelle shared that she always liked skating for that reason. "It was a way to get my head out of everything that was going on."

Rochelle also brought up how weird and eerie things were for her after her dad passed away. I interpreted that she was in need of a place to go that was comforting during that stressful time; physical activity was often that place when things felt unbearable. "Sitting around in that feeling like your missing something on top of what you're already missing was really weird to be around too, so literally it was a place to go because I wanted to get out of my house." Carly shared Rochelle's insights into how essential it was have a place where you could put your worries on hold for a while. "It was a totally new environment to put my brain into and I didn't ever think about anything else happening at home while I was at dance." She elaborated that her ability to dissociate from other stressors in her life allowed her to develop her abilities as a dancer as well. "I think that made me a better dancer too... just being able to have the full focus on it."

Furthermore, the diversion that physical activity provided from adversity consequently allowed participants to channel in and focus on the moment. For example, Terra explained that

when she would go to practice or games, she had to focus on what she was doing in that moment and therefore she did not have to think about other things. "I was always very focused... I was at soccer so it was just channel everything at that when I was there and then when I would leave it was you know go back to whatever else." Jennifer also expressed how important it was for her to have running to focus on, especially in stressful times with school or relationships. "Running gives me a break from everything else." After taking a long time to reflect on what the significance of that break was for her, she declared during our second interview that it gave her "perspective!" She elaborated "I always find that when I go for a run or a workout... afterwards I'll study... [and] I'll have more insight and I'll be [able to] retain things better." The comments the participants made influenced me to interpret that physical activity serves several purposes in relation to the distraction from adversity sub theme. In addition to leveling emotional distress, it also served as means to help the participants cognitively think clearer when things started to appear muddled due to various tensions or worries.

#### 4.2.2.2 Positive Outlet

In addition to the participants' experiences of channeling their energy and distracting themselves from adversity with physical activity, the subtheme of a positive outlet emerged frequently in the data; "An outlet to get it all out" as Carly mentioned several times throughout the course our interviews. She discussed how isolating, confusing, and difficult it was going through a divorce, especially as an only child. Carly often felt there was no one to talk to that would understand, no outlet to get out the pent up emotions. Dance allowed her to harness this part of her grief. "Instead of trying to internalize everything... I found my outlet," Carly explained. She discussed how this was not always the case, as she experienced much depression and upset before she figured out how to channel her emotions into the positive outlet provided

though dance. "I also started not to do good in school right after the divorce, before I had figured all this out... it was because I didn't have an outlet yet I think." Carly continued about how satisfying and relieving it was to have found what she needed. "Once I had found that happy place... found what I loved to do... and found the right track, things went really well and I was always really happy."

In a conversation about the purpose of physical activity, Rochelle elaborated that in addition to physical activity being an escape and a stress reliever, it was also an important place to positively vent and let things out. After her dad passed away, Rochelle was faced with many important decisions common to growing up and she missed having him to go to during those crucial parts of her development. Rochelle's relationship with physical activity also changed at this point in time: "I just stopped skating all together- it just felt like nothing I do really matters and is important but I actually ended up taking up running." She discussed how she still felt she was doing something meaningful when she was active, which was really important while she was faced with the rapid uncertainty familiar to transitioning out of high school. She continued on about how this new but similar relationship with physical activity followed her to university. "I used [physical activity] when I was stressed or upset; I would just go and run... I still use physical activity as an outlet- I just stopped with something that I loved and started with something else."

Terra expressed how important it was for her to have something that she could be successful at when things were tough. Although the meaning of physical activity became more of a means for physical fitness in adulthood, in adolescence it was for fun, enjoyment, and showcasing her talents. She explained "the meaning was really just for fun... being the best that I could be." She continued, "sport was a way for me to show what I could do. I wasn't really musical and I got

good grades... but sport was just an outlet I guess; it became an outlet- that's what it had developed into." I found the stories of the other participants to converge at these points of fun and enjoyment in their responses to how physical activity was an "outlet" for coping with adversity. In our second interview, Jennifer compared her relationship with sport and physical activity to having faith and hope. She explained "it just shows that there's something good in your life still." Furthermore, after dealing with stressors and then going out and being active, she affirmed "it puts you in a good... mood." The euphoric effects of physical activity were shown to be invaluable while the participants embarked on their most challenging times.

#### 4.2.3 Nurturing Relationships

Throughout the course of the interviews and data analysis, I noticed common aspects between how the participants utilized physical activity in their relationships with themselves and others. "It taught me how to be a good friend" Carly declared in our second interview while she reflected on the importance of the relationships she made through dance. An aura of teamwork, companionship, support, and camaraderie was presented in the stories of the participants in addition to the learning processes that go along with such characteristics. Terra's comments on the relational aspect of physical activity were unique in a sense because she was involved primarily in a team sport while the other participants competed in individual sports. "Anytime we stepped on the field we were a family." She explained that although her team was often divided outside of soccer, they were united when they stepped on the field. In their individual ways, the other participant's stories converged in the sense that it was sport specifically, which taught them how to work with others effectively. These interpersonal skills were important protective factors as they countered the adversity in their adolescence; they were also very transferable in academics and the workplace as they transitioned to young adulthood.

In addition to how participants were able to nurture relationships with others through physical activity and sport, they were also provided with a strong means for personal growth and development. Rochelle discussed how some of her most important lessons were from the times she failed in skating. Rochelle reflected with a grin in our second interview, "cause some days just suck!" She explained that she would be covered in bruises in her attempts to learn new moves: "you fall a lot... and you fail a million times before you ever succeed." Rochelle enlightened me that in her experiences, "you succeed once and you remember that feeling and then you fail a million times more so you have to be willing to continue." Her experiences with failure and persistence revealed the emotional and psychological aspects of skating. In my interpretations of Rochelle's experiences as well as those of the other participants, I felt that the learning that goes on in such situations requires one to trust and rely on one's self. This relationship one nurtures with themselves is built on the foundations of balance as well as belief in one's self: subthemes which will be presented in the next sections. Elements that primarily related to the participants' relationships with others were uncovered through the subthemes of communication and connection as well as peer and mentor support, also of which will be presented in the next sections.

#### 4.2.3.1 Providing Balance

The participants in the study shared that adolescence in itself was "tough." Carly explained, "I think [physical activity]... helped me through that kind of roller coaster of emotions that will happen [as] a teenager... All of the ups and downs and just the mix that everybody goes through." She elaborated how dance specifically gave her balance because it was a stable factor amongst the unsteadiness she perceived during adolescence. "Having [dance]... to fight out some anger or deal with the sadness or something really great happened and I could go celebrate it with dance...

it was always there for me regardless of my personal roller coaster." She commented further on the importance of having such consistency in adolescence:

It was the steady factor in my life, it was always there, it was always the same, it was always great to do and I just always felt so much better after physical activity... Having something to lean on almost helped every time to balance the rest of my life out... just something constant because nothing else in my life was.

Other participants shared Carly's insights into how chaotic and challenging adolescence alone felt; adding the experience of adversity into this time where they felt especially vulnerable often could feel unbearable. In the perspectives of the participants, physical activity was a resource they had to personally regulate their emotional development through this stage of life.

Earlier, I explained that physical activity provided that immediate relief when things were especially difficult. I also heard the participants speak of how necessary it was to have something to balance one's life when they felt insecure. Physical activity often served the purpose of bringing things back into kilter, establishing or re-establishing a sense of normalcy amidst chaos. Rochelle explained this idea further as she reflected in our second interview on her choices of activities after her father passed away: "sport for me... was a way of going back to when things were not crazy and chaotic." I heard echoes of the normalizing components Rochelle suggested in Terra's perspective as well. In a discussion about the relational difficulties she often felt with other girls during adolescence, Terra exclaimed "I was still part of a family, right like we were, like anytime we stepped on the field we were a family." Soccer provided normalizing effects in the sense that she felt like she belonged; she was part of a team. I found this to be significant because the adversity Terra experienced was in her relationships with others; her participation



enabled her to work through the social developmental challenges she experienced in adolescence.

Like the other participants, Jennifer shared how physical activity gave her balance in life. It was something to look forward to, which was really important when she felt preoccupied with too much of one thing, such as academics or even internal struggles. "[Physical activity] really gives me... another thing in life other than just academics... it just gives me focus in life and balance." Jennifer shared Terra's perspective about how important physical activity was for her social development. Before Jennifer had what she referred to as "a turning point" in adolescence, she expressed that she was unbalanced when it came to having relationships with others. "When I had Social Anxiety Disorder, I wanted to be more extroverted... when I connected with others I could tell that I was changing in that way... I wanted to have more of a social life." As was expressed by Jennifer earlier, participating in physical activity enabled her to work on the social aspects of her personal development.

#### 4.2.3.2 Instilling Belief in Self

In relation to overcoming adversity, the participants expressed how physical activity often influenced them to view themselves more positively. "It really gave me a huge boost of confidence," Carly indicated in a discussion about how physical activity impacted her emotional development. She talked about the benefits she received when she competed and performed dance pieces that represented who she was. "It really started with positive confidence and kind of more self respect in a way- knowing that I was actually good at something and somebody else thought that other than, like, my mom." Carly's words demonstrated that physical activity helped her improve her relationship with herself. She felt successful when she danced which allowed

her to see her personal strengths and be kinder to herself as opposed to being overwhelmed with the adversities she was experiencing during adolescence.

In a conversation about her experience growing up with bullying, Terra explained how it gave her a way to showcase strength and ability; thus, it helped her deal with her internal reactions to the bullying she was experiencing. "Aside from the bullying or those kinds of situations I encountered at school... I was still seeing that success and I was still seeing that 'yes I can;' I can do things regardless of what anybody says." Terra continued, "that really helped keep me resilient and keep me going... [It] helped me just to have something positive in my life that I could work towards." Rochelle shared Terra's struggles with the social challenges common to adolescence. "I just find girls to be catty... like you know these are the popular girls... I was just as good as them but... I wasn't included." Like Terra, Rochelle also found sport to be a retreat where she could work on herself without being influenced by others negativity. "I think I just liked doing what I was doing- that it didn't bother me. And I feel like the type of sport that I was involved in was really what made me as resilient in that way."

Rochelle also voiced that skating helped her foster independence and individual strength: "it taught me to really find strength in myself and then to really take responsibility for my own actions." Rochelle elaborated "it also showed me that- really I was capable!" Rochelle connected that these characteristics she developed in adolescence could have to do with her innate personality or possibly the individual nature of the sport she was involved in. She said she was never shy to try new things, do things on her own, or voice her opinion. Jennifer also described how physical activity helped her instill belief in her self: "you feel like you have more freedom, more confidence, better self esteem... you feel like you can know what your interests are." In our conversation, it occurred to me that finding that trust, strength, and belief in one's self would be

individually liberating. I interpreted the participant's stories to describe how people often get absorbed in internal or external struggles and that it can be incredibly healing and even invigorating to discover what one personally likes, enjoys, and ultimately helps them find happiness. Jennifer reflected in the context of competing with cross country running: "you have to... let things go... you just have to put faith in yourself- be like 'I've practiced for this a lot so I can do just as well or better as these people here'." Jennifer connected this experience with sport to writing exams in university. Often anxiety clouds one's judgment and impacts their performance; however, understanding one's self and trusting in their abilities can give individuals the freedom needed to deliver their best performances.

#### 4.2.3.3 Self Expression

The young women in this study discussed the role of physical activity as a means for self expression amidst the adversity they were experiencing in adolescence. Physical activity often served as a means for the young women to communicate and connect with themselves and others, when there no words that could convey what they needed to say. Carly referred to how physical activity, specifically dance, allowed her to express her intense feelings to herself, parents and peers through movement. Carly endured much anguish and upset through the fights between her parents in addition to the struggles common to growing up through adolescence. She spent a lot more time in the studio during times full of arguments at home. When discussing the purpose of physical activity, she discussed dance as a way to sort the intense feelings she was experiencing during her parents divorce.

I didn't have someone else to talk to and obviously I wasn't talking to my parents so... when [the divorce] happened, it was just me and... I never actually said anything about it. I would just take it to a better environment and dance it out... I never verbalized any of

my feelings; that never seemed to work for me. Going to counsellors... didn't really work.

So it was always something that I had to work out physically.

In Carly's recollection above, it appeared as though she received the mental health benefits people expect to achieve through counselling. She discussed working it out physically as opposed to verbally. "[Performing a piece] was just like talking to a therapist but nobody and everybody understood but I never had to say anything... It just was like a way of telling my story." Carly's perspective fits uniquely into the subtheme of communication and connection because she was able to correspond intrapersonally and interpersonally through movement; dance allowed her to become more in tune with herself as well as sort out her feelings and emotions without actually talking to someone.

Rochelle shared a similar outlook to Carly with how physical activity helped her sort out the internal emotional battles she was experiencing during adolescence. "After my dad passed away... I felt really lost and I didn't know what was important anymore," she explained during our first interview. Although Rochelle sought help through counselling as well, sometimes talking was not what she needed to sort things out. When she would feel overwhelmed with feelings of loss or the stresses of university, she explained that running on the paths by the river was comforting. "Outdoorsy is home... like [the] woods is where I'd feel comfortable." She explained: "my dad and I used to hunt so I'd spend a lot of time in the bush... Running along the paths by the river makes me feel like I'm at home and calms me down a little bit." While listening to Rochelle, I thought that the activities she did evoked memories of the good times she shared with her father. Perhaps this allowed her to feel connected with him; in addition, it helped her decrease the stress she was feeling in the moment. On a similar note, Jennifer also shared

how she felt better and more optimistic about life after being active. "[You have] perspective after you're finished running or after your finished having a game... more positive thoughts."

Terra expressed how difficult her interactions were with the girl that bullied her during adolescence. She discussed using sport as a means to defend herself. "I just [used] sport... to say leave me alone and she still continued in the classroom but sport helped me to be able to put her in her place without having to be nasty back or... devious." Because Terra was so strong on the field, it made it harder for the bully to pick her apart. I interpreted Terra's recollection to mean that she was showing the bully, with her strength and courage on the field, that she was not going to submit to her hostility. Carly shared a similar perspective to Terra's, in which physical activity allowed her to communicate in her interpersonal relationships. Specifically, dance served additional purposes for communicating feelings indirectly with her parents and others.

I've never been good at talking things out so if I could dance it out, show them the pain I was feeling: the anger and the upset. If I could find a song... that described what I was feeling and put movement to it, it was like a three minute long story of the last year of my life that everybody could watch without judging me.

#### 4.2.3.4 Peers & Mentor Support

The young women in this study referred to the countless relationships they built through the medium of physical activity. They discussed peers, coaches, role models, teachers and mentors that were significant to them during adolescence. "My first set of friends came from dance" said Carly in a discussion about how physical activity influenced her social development during adolescence. In addition to the camaraderie that the participants explained they gained through physical activity, the positive mentors they found through coaches and teachers were invaluable when they were in their most vulnerable states.

One of the findings I found to be especially interesting was how normalizing sport and physical activity could be amidst the most unpleasant times the participants experienced.

All my friends were involved in sport and activity too so... that was encouraging for me to stay active and stay doing... what I was doing just because one it was normal and I mean normal as in what I was doing before.

In Rochelle's words, it appeared that sport and activity provided her stability in the sense that it stayed the same. Though many other things in her life were different after her dad passed away, sport was still there for her. Additionally, the supportive relationships that surrounded her involvement in sport and physical activity were there as well. "That [is] where all my friends were so if I wanted comfort or some sort of friendship or companionship or anything like that, I needed to be at this place." In the voices of Rochelle and other participants in the study, I found that physical activity provided a place where they felt connected to their peers without the feelings of indifference, awkwardness, or judgment they experienced in other settings.

Jennifer disclosed how important her connections with her teammates were in supporting her personal development. While reflecting on her relationship with one of her friends at the track, she explained with a chuckle "she knows how I am so negative at the beginning of a race, she's like 'if you were to tape yourself, you would be like oh my gosh, you're so pessimistic!'" Jennifer admitted that she struggles with being overly self critical; she found that the peers and coaches she met through running assisted her to see things from a different perspective. She elaborated about how she takes her perfectionist attitude to her academics too and that it is not very constructive for learning. "[I'm] negative, pessimistic with my exam marks... like 'oh I could have done so much better and stuff like that.'" Jennifer shared that she is learning the same lessons in running as well as academics. "I just don't have much patience. That's probably my

problem." Jennifer continued about how fortunate she felt to have sensitive people in her life to remind her to be kinder to herself, including her coach. "My coach told me too, he's like 'you have to have patience, you have to know that... it's going to take a while to be good at racing.'"

The majority of the participants in this study discussed how they still have relationships with the people they met through physical activity. Carly talks about how the people she met in her classes were some of her best friends and that dance was what connected them. The support they provided for each other was very meaningful.

They are girls that I am still friends with now... we don't really have anything in common except for the fact we danced together... Those were some of the people that really carried me through [high school] and even my best friends now were made because we were in the same dance class so I really built a secure group of friends that was willing to help each other through everything.

All of the participants identified that they still are in touch with the significant coaches and teachers that they met in their journeys with physical activity and sport. Terra recollected her relationship with the most significant coach she had through adolescence: "[he] was a positive impact on my life, he was someone who pushed me... believed in me." She had seen him support other athletes and trusted him to be there for her too. Terra told me about a recent encounter she had with her important coach and mentor from adolescence: "he was a big part of my life... I said 'if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be where I am today.'" She elaborated that what influenced her mostly about this coach was his unconditional regard for his athletes. Even when things weren't going well, "he was still there everyday and never walked out on us. In a practice... if we weren't performing or someone was like 'I don't really care to practice today'... he didn't let that affect him." Terra shared that she aspires to be like him in her interactions with her athletes.

#### 4.2.4 Challenging the Self

*Challenging the self* was a superordinate theme that emerged through the participant's stories of perseverance, persistence, and desire to push the limits of their potentials. "Can I keep going?" Terra reiterated a few times throughout the interviews. I felt her perspective highlighted the essence of this theme. In Terra's words:

I love that feeling... you know 'can I push myself till I can't go anymore? 'And reach my goal and then emotionally sometimes when you work so hard... your emotions just come out... you start tearing up cause you're so happy or you start crying cause you're so tired.

Terra illuminated the emotional investments these young women shared in their experiences with physical activity. She continued with a hint of exasperation and laughter, that she feels "tired but excited" after she has completed a hard workout or competition. After a long pause to reflect, she elaborated that she also feels "proud.... mostly like belief in myself afterwards." I felt that the *challenging the self* superordinate theme aligned and interconnected with the *nurturing relationships* and *channeling energy* superordinate themes. Specifically, aspects of subthemes such as instilling belief in self and positive outlet were also evident in the stories that drew out the *challenging the self* superordinate theme. The participants embodied experiences where they channeled everything they were feeling into movement and increased their perceptions of what was possible.

Jennifer recollected the specific aspects of cross country that influenced her resilience. She summed it up quite eloquently in a simple statement: "it's about running your own race." Jennifer explained this idea further: "it's about resilience and just putting yourself in the right mind frame... I've had races when I don't start out good but then the last kilometer will be better... It's about individual determination." I perceived Jennifer's experience to essentially



equate racing as a metaphor for resilience; this was an idea that emerged from Terra's experiences earlier, when she discussed the shared meaning of resilience through life and through sport. When individuals encounter adversities throughout life or within physical activity, it does not mean they are destined for failure. These are the most crucial times for learning and personal growth.

#### 4.2.4.1 Autonomy

"[Dance] was my thing" Carly mused in our first interview together. I found the theme of autonomy to be an underlying factor leading to a sense of wellbeing and healthy development in the experiences of the participants. Autonomy is a concept that refers to "having a sense of one's own identity and an ability to act independently and exert control over one's environment" (Bernard, 1993); it is commonly referred to as "self-directing freedom and especially moral independence" (Merriam-Webster, 2014). I heard the participants speak of lessons in which physical activity often served as an arena where they were their own agents, exercising their skills, reflecting, and making personal decisions. "I think figure skating in particular really taught me to take like ownership of my own behavior," Rochelle declared as she reflected on whether physical activity functioned as a means for resilience in her life.

When I skated, I won by myself and I lost by myself. If I landed a jump it was because I landed it... if I fell on my butt it was because I did something wrong. So I feel like it taught me to really find strength in myself and then to really take responsibility for my own actions and what I was doing.

The sense of ownership and responsibility that Rochelle exclaimed in the quote above surfaced as I dived further into the transcripts of the other participants. In Terra's words, "you don't get anything unless you work hard for it!" That innate drive and intrinsic motivation to push one's

self, set personal goals, and learn from their experience was apparent in the experiences of the other participants when they explored the relationship between physical activity and resilience. Rochelle concluded our second interview with the reasoning she reminds herself of when faced with difficult situations: "I feel like when I have an issue or a problem, my first resource is myself, I have myself, I can fix this." With that in mind, Rochelle perceived resilience to also involve a strong sense of self-awareness and resourcefulness in her encounters with adversity. She stated that "resilience is also... asking for help when you can't do it yourself and knowing what your limits are and going okay I can't do this alone, I need someone to help."

The participants brought up the value of goal setting frequently as they related their experiences with physical activity and the meaning of resilience. In a discussion regarding the meaning of physical activity, Terra elaborated that in addition to helping her channel energy, physical activity served another important purpose; it was: "a way to reach a goal." Specifically, she explained that physical activity allowed her to develop positively despite growing up with adversity because she was able to experience success and literally see and feel how hard work pays off through her performances. "It was always nice to be able to see results... you can tell being in your own skin if you are getting faster or if you feel a little bit stronger." Achieving those short and long term goals as well as seeing personal development was highly motivating for the participants. I interpreted the participant's experiences to include sharing a sense of purpose and meaning in their identities with physical activity; it was their entity, first and foremost.

Jennifer provided me insight into the essence of her personal desire find autonomy: "if you want a change in what you do in resilience; you change, your freeing yourself from your situation." Jennifer was linking her experiences with physical activity and those with managing

adversity. Not only was she able to find freedom from pressures or adversities by the physical distraction of being active, she consciously was choosing to free herself cognitively and emotionally as well. Carly expressed similar ideas about the importance of finding autonomy as a means for resilience as she reflected on the most difficult times of adolescence. "I didn't really know who I was anymore - hadn't found me." She advised me further that after the turning point in her youth, once she found dance "I made friends and grades went up and my relationship with my parents changed and I was happier and I was dancing more." She associated this crucial moment with the autonomous choice to do more of what she loved to do and push the limits of her potential.

#### 4.2.4.3 Self Actualization

The participants discussed repeatedly how sport influenced their future identities and the types of people they strived to become. "I think it shaped who I am today," Terra declared in a conversation about how physical activity impacted her life. She commented further "the competitiveness that I got from sport, I turned around and used that competitiveness within all aspects of my life... with my job... with school, trying to be the best I can." Physical activity provided a secure means to encourage them to challenge themselves, to reach what they believed to be their "best selves." Although it was a long and often rocky road that the participants traveled as they navigated through adolescence, they all agreed that physical activity contributed to the person they grew into.

People have innate motives guiding them towards personal growth, or self actualization (Kramer, Bernstein, Phares, 2009). Self actualization is commonly defined as "the realization or fulfillment of one's talents and potentialities;" it is "a drive or need present in everyone" (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2009). I found this theme to emerge in the participant's stories as

they reflected on what they learned through physical activity, the turning points they experienced, and their current place in life. Carly talked about how her attitude and wellbeing shifted at a specific point in adolescence; this was facilitated by dance:

I decided that I didn't want to do such negative things anymore and that was more of the type of person I wanted to be... the one that could make things up on the fly and had a smile on her face and made people kind of light weight and heart felt when they were watching... I took things to the next level and changed who I wanted to be at that point.

That desire to discover the realm of one's full potential lied within each participant; their experience with physical activity played a meaningful role in the process they went through as they found themselves during this stage of life.

The participant's innate drive to push the limits of what they believed to be possible emerged in the experiences they shared. In Terra's words, "I'm the kind person, I'm tired but I want to keep going; I like that feeling." She described the physical feelings of being sore and tired after a hard work out. She liked those feelings because it was evidence of what she accomplished that day. She shared, "I'm really driven by how it makes me feel." Jennifer described a similar perspective with racing and how it related to her ability to persevere and achieve resilience in life and in sport. "It's just... [because you] gotta just keep on going!" I believe the experiences of athletes, like those in this study, are likely different from those who do not have the same meaningful relationship with physical activity. I interpreted a mind - body connection in the stories of the participants. For example, they exerted so much physical energy during a really intense work out; it was difficult to avoid being emotionally invested as well. As Terra mentioned earlier, it was not uncommon to be tearful after working so hard towards a goal.

The lessons the participants have learned through physical activity in adolescence are vast and varied. Most participants expressed that they are far from being done learning or discovering themselves further as they continue their personal journeys towards health and wellbeing. In a conversation about the unique aspects of physical activity that promoted resilience, Rochelle described her experience with running a marathon for the first time. What felt like an insurmountable task, became a life changing moment for her:

Finally when I crossed that finish line, I felt like "okay, I can't feel my body and feel like I'm going to die, someone get me a stretcher!" Honestly all that was running through my mind after I could think again was, "you did it!" Being able to self-talk your way through the most painful thing I've ever done so far... and be able to finish made me think: "you can do anything!" Doesn't matter how hard your stupid class is that you're taking or whatever concept you don't understand, you can do this! And I don't think I would have ever experienced something like that if I hadn't [ran] and done physical activity... It totally changed my perspective on what I was doing... I don't think you need like a big huge moment like that either... I think even people scoring a winning basket is enough!

In Rochelle's account, it is clear that the accomplishments individuals make through the medium of physical activity are transferable to other facets of life and that they can be incredibly powerful. The role of physical activity in building resilience during adolescence cannot be underestimated. The experiences the young women gained through participating in physical activity allowed them to develop positively through channeling energy, nurturing relationships, and ultimately working towards achieving aspects of self actualization in their lives thus far.

### 4.3 The Female Experience of Physical Activity

Available literature demonstrates that although adolescent females receive numerous positive developmental benefits from physical activity, they are significantly less active than adolescent males (Statistics Canada, 2005). The reasoning behind this discrepancy could be that adolescent females face social barriers to participating in physical activity in the nature of gender ideologies and stereotypes (Adams, Schmitke, & Franklin, 2005). With the information above in mind, I questioned my participants about their experiences with barriers to physical activity in adolescence.

The participants in this study expressed converging and diverging experiences with participating in physical activity as an adolescent female. In general, Terra and Rochelle explained that they felt the biggest barriers they experienced with physical activity related to their location being in a rural community. In terms of issues specifically related to being female. Terra expressed how she felt females are treated less seriously with regards to sports and physical activity, particularly in relationship to scholarships and advertising. She referred to a need for "leveling the playing field" for women's sports in relation to the men's sports.

Some of the young women shared stories of resistance in relation to their experiences growing up as active adolescent females. Terra shared her relational feelings as a female athlete:

I think that being active at a high level can be isolating at times if you don't have individuals close to you that are as active as you that can share and understand what you're going through and I never really had that, never really have.

Her experience of isolation was facilitated by the gender norms regarding adolescent females participating in physical activity. She discussed how she had to make a choice between being feminine and being an athlete as if these two ideals could not occur simultaneously.

There's boys and there's drinking and there's make up and (laughter) you know all those kind of girly things and some people choose to just quit and pursue maybe at a lower level which is fine, everyone is going to do what they want but I feel like being young and being a girl, your not necessarily in society... not necessarily like you're discouraged from continuing sport but its definitely not the norm.

When the young women in the study where queried about what could be done differently with physical activity programming for adolescent females, they provided several suggestions. For example, Terra and Carly shared that they thought it was essential for more young female role models to be instituted in coaching or volunteer positions. In Terra's words, "I think having a role model or being able to work with and speak to someone who's gone through what you've gone through and there isn't a huge age gap definitely would improve female participation in sport." Terra also explained how she felt it was important for young women and adolescent females to be promoted through advertising. "In the media... showing females playing sports... like New Balance, there's women pushing themselves hard, they're being active in sport."

#### 4.4 Summary

This chapter analyzed and explored the lived experiences of four young women who defined themselves as physically active in adolescence. These young women utilized physical activity to manage the adversity or difficult and uncontrollable life circumstances they were exposed to during adolescence. IPA guidelines informed my approach to data analysis. The theoretical foundations of IPA entail that phenomena can be explored through tapping into the experiences of individuals who have had direct contact with the phenomenon. This study contributed to the literature by uncovering the constructs of resilience and physical activity in the perspectives of the four young women interviewed.

The participants' shared experiences merged to form the following themes: *self-development in the face of adversity*, *channeling energy*, *nurturing relationships*, and *challenging the self*. The over arching theme, *self-development in the face of adversity*, served to connect and tie together the other themes. *Channeling energy* emerged as an immediate method of coping for the participants; they utilized physical activity to harness pent up emotions. Physical activity served to distract them from adversities as well as create a positive outlet to manage stress. *Nurturing relationships* emerged out of the subthemes relating the participants' relationships with themselves and others while they were navigating adversity through adolescence. Physical activity served these young women during adolescence by nurturing their relationships. It facilitated them by providing balance and instilling belief in self in addition to fostering self expression as well as peer and mentor support. Lastly, *challenging the self* emerged as a representation of the young women's journeys towards health and wellbeing despite growing up with adversity during adolescence. Physical activity assisted the participants to move forward and develop autonomy as well as self actualization.



## 5. DISCUSSION

*"The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall."*

- Nelson Mandela

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of physical activity in the experiences of resilience young women shared as they reflected on how they navigated through adversity in adolescence. Available literature has demonstrated that physical activity can provide many benefits in youth, including resilience (See Collingwood, 1997; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2007; Petitpas, Cornelius, Raalte, Jones, 2005; Martinek & Hellison, 1997). In addition, despite the numerous benefits that physical activity offers, many youth remain inactive, especially females (Statistics Canada, 2005). Therefore, this study illuminated experiences of resilience during adolescence, including the role of physical activity, from the retrospectives of four young women. The participants in this study were an exception to the norm because these young women defined themselves as physically active during adolescence. Furthermore, they believed that physical activity played a role in their resilience. Their insights were invaluable because they described specific aspects of physical activity that facilitated resilience, findings that could be transferable to other vulnerable populations. The following chapter will provide a brief summary of the findings and integrate them with the current literature. The strengths, limitations and delimitations of this study will also be discussed followed by implications for professionals, directions for future research, and advice to other adolescent females undergoing adversity.

### 5. 1 Summary of Findings and Current Research Literature

In the context of the literature, I noticed that the participants' stories revealed that it was often characteristics associated with *sport* as opposed to physical activity, which facilitated their resilience in adolescence. *Sport* is a form of physical activity that includes gross physical skills,

competition, and institutional aspects such as rules, history, and a wide geographical base (Drewe, 2003); whereas, *physical activity* is a broader concept, where essentially any movement of the body resulting in energy expenditure is included (Caspersen, Powell, & Christenson, 1985). Therefore, there was much overlap between these two constructs in my discussions with the participants. I chose to use *physical activity* as the primary construct to be explored in my research question because it included various forms of physical expression, such as dance which is often debated as being a sport or a performing art in the literature (Nordin-Bates, 2012). Most of the participants, with the exception of Jennifer, had completed their competitive careers in sport by the time of the interviews. I noticed as I listened to the participants stories, that although they repeatedly referred to their experiences with *sport* facilitating their resilience through adolescence, it was also a time where they built meaningful relationships with *physical activity*. Furthermore, the participants expressed that physical activity was what they accessed in adulthood when they were coping with stressful situations. I question if this would have been the case if they had not developed such meaningful relationships with physical activity through the medium of sport in adolescence. Therefore, the constructs of sport and physical activity are intricately connected and often utilized interchangeably throughout this discussion.

Other qualitative research in the area of resilience has demonstrated the importance of adolescent females developing positive short and long term strategies for managing adversity (Shepherd, Reynolds, & Moran, 2010). The current research study aids in the discovery of how physical activity facilitates the process young women undergo as they strive for resilience amidst adversity in their youth. All participants in the current study identified a specific activity or sport that they connected with in their journeys to overcoming difficult internal and or external life circumstances occurring in adolescence. An overarching theme that connected the experiences of

all four young women was *self-development in the face of adversity*. This theme was prevalent as the participants described their experiences. The process that participants underwent as they strived to achieve health and wellness in the face of adversity was influenced through the superordinate themes of *channeling energy*, *nurturing relationships*, and *challenging the self*. First, *channeling energy* explored the participants' desire and need to find an immediate distraction and positive outlet when confronted with adversity. Secondly, *nurturing relationships* was discovered as an important component in the participants' journeys towards healing and recovery. Physical activity provided a means to find balance, belief in self, self expression, in addition to peer and mentor support. Lastly, *challenging the self* was exposed as the theme directly related to overcoming adversity as well as thriving and flourishing despite life challenges. It was revealed that autonomy and self actualization were important facets of this critical experience. In the following sections, I will present the themes discussed above and throughout chapter four within a wider context by integrating them with the current literature.

## 5.2 Self Development in the Face of Adversity

*Self development in the face of adversity* emerged as the overarching theme in the data; it depicted the epitome of the interpreted advancements the women went through as they encountered adversity but still developed positively. Participants alluded to this theme as they shared stories of coping, learning, and personal growth. Moving forward or progressing is what fundamentally characterizes *development*; however, it was clear in the participants' stories that the processes they experienced were not always sequential or linear. As often elucidated to in the literature, resilience or positive development in the face of adversity (Lee, Cheung, & Kwong, 2012), is a dynamic process where one adapts and achieves perceived health and wellbeing (Luthar, Cichetti, & Becker, 2000; Richardson, 2002; Ungar, 2005; Windle 2011). As the

participants navigated through adolescence and circumstances collectively deemed adverse, physical activity served as a refuge where it was safer to discover who they were individually and what they needed or wanted. Ungar (2004b) brought forth the idea that youth often negotiate within their environments for the resources they need to define themselves as healthy despite adverse conditions, thus achieving resilience. Although the external and internal circumstances the participants experienced in adolescence were challenging, physical activity functioned as a safety net where they could find resources and discover healthy ways of coping. While it was not always clear that physical activity was playing such a crucial role in their development during adolescence, participants all reflected as adults that there were aspects of their chosen pursuits that facilitated their resilience.

All youth have the ability to thrive and develop optimally (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004); however, some youth are at an increased vulnerability to maladaptive life outcomes because they were subjected to unduly negative experiences within their families, communities, or within themselves (Willms, 2002). Youth exposed to circumstances collectively deemed adverse, undergo *processes* in their experiences of resilience or in their journeys towards positive development, health, and wellbeing (Richardson, 2002; Ungar, 2005). These processes are of great interest to society and researchers because this population is at an increased need for services and interventions. Prior research supports the positive impacts of physical activity for youth development; however, there is limited research in the context of youth who have faced adversity. It has been demonstrated that physical activity is connected to positive youth development (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005), but the voices and perspectives of youth who have faced adversity are absent from this literature. In addition, the availability of protective factors that counteract risk factors or adversity is a critical condition for one to have resilience

(Windle, 2011). The current study suggests that involvement in physical activity and or sport during adolescence may help youth, specifically females, develop skills to facilitate resilience or protect and buffer them from risk factors and ultimately negative life outcomes in the future.

Available literature regarding physical activity behaviors and its relationship to mental health is predominantly *on* adolescents as opposed to being *with* or *for* them (Carless & Douglas, 2010; Darbyshire, Macdougall, & Schiller, 2005). Most of the literature focuses on measuring what physical activity takes away in terms of symptoms, impairments or problems as opposed to what it means, contributes or brings to a persons life (Carless & Douglas, 2010). *Self development in the face of adversity* demonstrates the essence of what physical activity has done for the young women who participated in the study. In the context of the current study, it is clear that there are specific methods in which sport and physical activity have facilitated the development of adolescent females who have undergone adversity. The *experiences* individuals undergo as they navigate adversity and still develop positively have been sidelined in the literature. The current study brought forth these valuable insights from the perspectives of young women who shared meaningful relationships with physical activity. In short, physical activity has played a significant role in how the young women in the study experienced resilience and developed positively despite growing up with adversity in adolescence. The themes of *channeling energy*, *nurturing relationships*, and *challenging the self*, to be discussed in the next sections, emerged on a continuum illustrating this experience. It was revealed how physical activity helped the participants develop themselves positively despite the adversities they endured.

### 5.2.1 Channeling Energy

Previous literature suggested that protective factors function in young people's lives to modify, ameliorate, or alter a person's response to environmental stressors that would otherwise

predispose that individual to maladaptive outcomes (Gitterman, 1991; Rutter, 1985; Rutter, 1990). The importance of developing skills to self regulate during stressful conditions has been shown to be crucial for positive development (Luthar, Cicchetti, Becker, 2000). The participants' references to the role physical activity played in "channeling" or "releasing" energy, explicated these essential skills. For example, Rochelle discussed how physical activity gave her "something to do instead of feeling frustrated" or "boxed in and pent up with [her] life." She went on to explain that: "when stuff was bad, I always felt like 'okay, activity is there to get you out of the house or get you out of your head.'" I believe Rochelle's words captured the essence of *channeling energy*. This theme emerged as I examined and interpreted the experiences and feelings the participants shared when they were active. All participants had meaningful relationships with physical activity in which it was their vent to regulate the mix of the emotions they experienced while confronting risk factors and adversity.

In the present study, *distraction* and *positive outlet* were utilized to illustrate the immediacy and urgency of the respite and relief that was needed during times of hardship for the participants. More research is needed to identify the processes that support individual's quests for resilience (Richardson, 2002); I believe the themes above illuminated this area where research is lacking. Youth should be encouraged to find *distraction* and *positive outlet* through the method of physical activity. Within *distraction*, the participants alluded to how good it felt to be present in the moment while they were participating in physical activity. The mind state the participants were referring to represented a mindful awareness in which they could accept their thoughts or feelings as they occur without trying to suppress or deny them (Neff, 2011). While being active, the participants explained that they had to be focused on what they were doing; therefore, they were able to take a break from thinking about the adverse circumstances they were experiencing

in other parts of their lives. This respite was essential because it relieved the pain they felt at that point of their lives. Perhaps the skills they were developing through physical activity in relation to mindful awareness were transferable into how they were able to confront adversity in the other aspects of their lives.

The participants concluded that things could have happened very differently for them if they did not have their chosen pursuits. For example, it has been demonstrated in the literature that not only does being involved in physical activity alleviate symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression (Health Canada, 2011), it also decreases the chances of adolescents becoming involved in health risk behaviors such as sexual activity, delinquency, drug usage, and truancy (Nelson & Gordon-Larsen, 2006). As Ungar (2004b) explained, resilience is relative to one's perception; therefore, it is not uncommon for youth to discover resilience through maladaptive behaviors and actions such as those listed above. Rochelle alluded to this as she reflected on how she utilized physical activity to navigate and negotiate within her environment to find what she needed to feel better. When she was active, she explained: "I could go and figure out what I was thinking... go and get out my anger and my frustrations instead of turning to drugs or alcohol and stuff like that." Rochelle rationalized that maladaptive ways of managing or regulating one's self were readily available to her and her peers during adolescence. "The other kind of things, [negative life choices and influences], just didn't even cross my mind cause physical activity was just what I went and did." Experiences such as the one Rochelle shared reinforce how physical activity could serve as a *positive outlet*, as well as a protective and preventative factor in the lives of adolescent females.

It has been demonstrated that individuals who are physically active, in comparison to their sedentary counterparts, are more resistant to the negative impacts of stressor exposure to their

mental and physical health (Fleshner, Maier, Lyons, & Raskind, 2011). Particularly relevant to the experiences the participants in this study shared, the harmful outcomes adverse situations often present to individuals lessen as individuals become more physically active (Brown & Siegel, 1998). The young women in the current study discovered in adolescence that they felt relieved and more readily able to deal with the stressors of their lives after they participated in physical activity. In Carly's words, "I would just work it all out... I would do the best I could in everything I could for that one hour." She explained that after her ballet workouts, "I was exhausted and just felt like I had done a really good job." Carly shared that she would get anxious or frustrated easily in adolescence but would always feel calm and relaxed after ballet. "That anger from other parts of my life was out... I felt like I didn't have to deal with it anymore because I had already used it all up... I worked through it and realized, [it] wasn't my problem." In summary, the participants' abilities to *channel energy*, or harness adversity, negotiate, and navigate within their environments for the resources they needed, characterized their experiences with physical activity as a means for resilience.

### 5.2.2 Nurturing Relationships

The value of relationships for positive development in adolescent females has been emphasized in the literature repeatedly (NCRIM, 2002). Specifically, physical activity serves as a catalyst for such growth in interpersonal relationships where individuals are able to connect more readily with their peers, parents, and communities (see Dinç, 2011; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2007); in addition, intrapersonal relationships are also facilitated as they can effectively foster positive self regard, coping skills, and good mental health (see Paluska & Schwenk, 2000; Taylor, Sallis & Needle, 1985). Physical activity has been linked to fostering positive social development through building citizenship (Elley & Kirk, 2002), positive peer



relationships (Evans & Roberts, 1987; Weis, Smith, & Theeboom, 1996), and leadership skills (Wright & Côté, 2003). In the same token, it has also been demonstrated that physical activity is associated with improved mental health and psychological benefits (Paluska & Schwenk, 2000; Taylor, Sallis & Needle, 1985). Through their participation, youth are offered opportunities to feel enjoyment, enhance self-esteem, decrease stress and anxiety, and alleviate depression (Health Canada, 2011; Long 1985; Mulholland, 2008). Going beyond the surface of *channeling energy*, the superordinate theme of *nurturing relationships* explored the intricate details of how processes work to heal or recover individuals during and after they experience adversity. Through *nurturing relationships*, the participants expressed a heightened sense of internal and external resources, and therefore the abilities to counter difficult circumstances more effectively.

In the present study, *providing balance*, *instilling belief in self*, *self expression*, as well as *peer and mentor support* served as themes that uncovered the complex processes that the young women in the study experienced within the medium of their chosen activities. As Richardson (2002) elucidated to, these processes are valuable insights for professionals in the field and other concerned or interested individuals. The themes above expose the specific aspects of the relationships that the young women in this study developed through adolescence and how physical activity nurtured and fostered those intimate connections. In *providing balance*, the array of intense affects or in Carly's words, the "roller coaster of emotions," that happened in adolescence was revealed. *Providing balance* demonstrated the role physical activity played in leveling out the overwhelming feelings the participants in the study associated with adolescence and the adversities they experienced. *Instilling belief in self* was an important component in the participants' emotional development. Physical activity allowed them to discover their inner confidence, strengths, abilities, independence, self-respect, self-esteem, and even freedom as the

internal resources they needed to buffer themselves from adversity. *Instilling belief in self* shared similar dimensions to the *positive outlet* subtheme within the *channeling energy* superordinate theme. Specifically, the participants' references to the importance of focusing on the positives in their lives as opposed to dwelling on the negatives or adversities represented the thought processes involved in their journeys to health and wellbeing or resilience. As Jennifer explained: "[participating in physical activity] just shows that there's something good in your life still." The importance of demonstrating positive mindsets has been related to athletes overcoming emotionally difficult situations and flourishing psychologically in sport (Ferguson, Kowalski, Mack, & Sabistonin, in press). The current study suggests that the skills physically active adolescent females develop in relation to positivity may transfer as internal resources they can draw upon as they counter adverse circumstances outside their chosen pursuits. In the participant' stories, intriguing tales of *self expression* were uncovered. Through participation activity, the participants identified that that they could communicate and connect with themselves and others without the confinements of verbal expression. They shared stories where they expressed passionate feelings and sorted through challenging situations through physical activity. In Jennifer's language, she found "perspective" and "positive thoughts" after she was finished working out. Lastly, *peer and mentor support* was disclosed as a powerful means for the participants to foster their social development and find the much needed interpersonal connections with caring peers, coaches, role models, teachers, and mentors.

A unique aspect of the experiences the participants shared about physical activity and managing adversity related to feelings of stability and normalcy amongst such challenging times. I heard the participants discuss participating in their chosen activities as safe places where they did not have to be bothered by the internal or external troubles they were experiencing in their

outside worlds. Carly mentioned dance as a "positive space in which... [one is] away from whatever is negative in their life... [Activity is] a chance to get out of that situation, to clear their mind." Furthermore, the participants reflected that they often felt a part of something when they were active. In Terra's words, "we were a family." The camaraderie and kinship the participants experienced through the theme of *nurturing relationships* afforded them valuable resources that fostered their emotional and social development. Shepard, Renyolds, and Moran (2010) highlighted the importance of building relationships and participating in 'normalizing' activities, such as those chosen by the participants in the current study, as important and effective long term strategies for overcoming adversity. Resilience is achieved because an individual's self worth, re-appraisal of adversity, responsibility, and sense of control are strengthened through such developmental projects in adolescence (Shepard, Renyolds, & Moran, 2010).

### 5.2.3 Challenging the Self

Prior research has suggested that physical activity provides a means for people to develop optimal psychological functioning so that they can flourish at their maximum potential or reach their eudemonic wellbeing (Ryff, 1989, 1995). In addition, it has been supported that quality physical activity contributes to women's lives, allowing them to fulfill their potential through goal setting/striving, providing bonding experiences, allowing for self reflection, and developing a physical/able body (Ferguson, Kowalski, Mack, Wilson, & Crocker, 2012). In the current research study, the connection between physical activity and optimal functioning or flourishing was reinforced through *challenging the self*. Furthermore, in the heart of this theme lied the innate desire and motivation within the participants, which allowed them to keep going in the face of challenges. In Richardson's (2002) discussion of the waves of research and metatheory of resilience, he explained that the third wave involves studying the motivational forces within

individuals or groups and how these forces can be activated through experiences. I propose that the current study enlightens aspects of that wave of research in the themes of *autonomy* and *self actualization*.

*Autonomy* and *self actualization* revealed the participants internal drives to set goals and be agents of their own change; they were able to discover freedom, purpose, meaning, and identity. Resilient youth are autonomous; they are not afraid to pursue personal achievements and are often viewed in the literature as “particularly able to swim upstream” (Martinek & Hellison, 1997, p. 37). The participants in the current study demonstrated resourcefulness and responsibility on their journeys to prospering and flourishing despite adversity. These skills, learned through the medium of physical activity, have followed them into adulthood and facilitated them as they began to navigate this new terrain. *Challenging the self*, interconnected with the other superordinate themes of *channeling energy* and *nurturing relationships*, demonstrated the essence of the role physical activity played in the young women’s resilience. These young women communicated that once they secured their foundation through the first two superordinate themes, they had a renewed and revitalized zest for life- along with the hardship that comes with it. In a resiliency model developed by Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, and Kumpfer (1990), it was suggested that individuals could react to life events and determine the outcomes with a conscious or unconscious choice. Individuals can choose to reintegrate with resilience, homeostasis, loss, or dysfunction. Resilient reintegration refers to the "coping process that results in growth, knowledge, self-understanding, and increased strength of resilient qualities" (Richardson, 2002, p. 310). A Canadian Olympian, Silken Laumann, shed light to the parallels between overcoming obstacles in sport with those experienced in her personal life: “It means using your unique abilities in a set of circumstances that you do not choose. In life, as in sports,

we seldom get to choose our own circumstances” (CAAWS, n.d.). The participants in the current story reinforced Laumann's analogy when they talked about situations in sport, such as running a race, as metaphors for resilience. Perhaps the themes that emerged within *challenging the self* demonstrated some of those qualities or processes that individuals encounter as they choose to reintegrate with resilience in the face of adversity.

Recently, research has linked the concept of self-compassion with an improved sense of wellbeing (Neff, 2011), an outcome also linked to participation in physical activity (FERENCE, 2004; Gilman, 2001). Interventions that target developing self-compassion in women athletes who struggle with managing self criticism, rumination, and concern over mistakes have been shown to be a valuable coping resource for those dealing with negative events in sport (Mosewich, Crocker, Kowalski, & DeLongis, 2013). The current study suggests that the protective factors participants discovered through the theme of *nurturing relationships* and *challenging the self* may also have undertones of self-compassion. In their accounts of resilience, relative to adversities outside of sport and or physical activity, the participants in the current study described how important it was to develop a positive relationship with one's self. This was particularly prevalent in the themes of *self expression* and *autonomy*. I found that as I listened to the participants share their stories of adversity, it was clear that it was important to acknowledge that things were tough but beating one's self up about it did not help them move forward. Self-compassion is when one is kind and understanding towards themselves when they are confronted with personal failing or difficult circumstances, as opposed to treating one's self with harsh judgment and criticism (Neff, 2011). It is particularly relevant to resilience research as it "is an adaptive way of relating to the self when considering personal inadequacies or difficult life circumstances" (Neff & McHehee, 2010, p. 225). Self-compassion can be especially valuable for

individuals to learn about in their journeys through adolescence, specifically the fact that imperfections are a natural part of the human experience (Neff, 2011). Perhaps the current research study adds to the efficacy of coaches and other professionals to incorporate threads of self-compassion in their approach to helping those coping with adversity within and outside the realm of physical activity.

Resilience is a dynamic process where one is able to manage significant sources of stress; available assets and resources facilitate individuals' abilities to 'bounce back' despite adverse circumstances (Windle, 2011). I learned from the participants that resilience is a process that does not always feel optimistic, but certainly influences the types of people individuals become and their approaches to life. Although physical activity did not encompass everything the participants needed to overcome adversity, it did present valuable assets and resources. Rochelle mused towards the end of our last interview that perseverance within physical activity is like a metaphor for resilience within the context of the internal and external adversities people encounter. She explained: "it's really hard at the beginning and once you get going and you get trucking along, you look back and you go 'oh man look at everything I've overcome and what I've accomplished.'" Physical activity served as a mechanism for the young women in the study to develop positively in the face of adversity through the themes of *channeling energy*, *nurturing relationships*, and *challenging the self*. As mentioned in Chapter One, campaigns such as: 'SPORT. It's More Than A Game' (SIMTAG), influenced my personal theory that physical activity plays a meaningful role in young women's experiences of resilience. The lessons adolescent women have learned through that medium are irreplaceable and exclusive to their perspectives; however, a shared essence was discovered through the themes discussed in this chapter.

### 5.3 Strengths of the Study

There are several strengths of this study. First, this study added to the literature in an area that was lacking. Specifically, the majority of the research studying the phenomena of resiliency and physical activity has been conducted with quantitative approaches. The current study contributed to the growing body of research in which accounts of resilience reveal the complex psychosocial processes and resources available to adolescents (Shepherd, Reynolds, & Moran, 2009).

This study utilized IPA as a specific qualitative approach to exploring the experiences of resilience and the role of physical activity in helping females manage adversity in adolescence. IPA allowed for an in depth exploration of the participants' perceptions of their experiences. The idiographic nature of this study, the double hermeneutic approach to data analysis, as well as the small and homogenous sample allowed for rich and detailed accounts of the individual experiences as well as collective accounts of the phenomena under investigation (Smith, 2003).

IPA is a specific qualitative approach that embraces researcher subjectivity and reflexivity; meaning it has ontological assumptions that guide the researcher in how she sees the "other." While I could observe and experience empathy with the participants in the study; I could never share entirely their experience because their experience belonged to their own embodied position in the world (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As a reflexive researcher, I acknowledge that the findings are a product of my interpretations (Jootun, Marland, & McGhee, 2009). In the same token, I collaborated with the participants to uncover the essence of their realities; as Gadamer (2004) explains, a 'fusion of horizons' occurred as I became enlightened about the experiences of my participants. This characteristic of IPA research afforded my study unique strengths. Although I was careful to bracket my values and beliefs, my personal background and

experiences also helped me identify with the participants. This allowed me to interpret the data with the sensitivity and understanding that could not be achieved by a total outsider.

The final strength of this study that I would like to discuss involved the impact of the research process on the participants involved in the study. All the participants departed from the interviews expressing gratitude, curiosity in the results, and pleasure in contributing to the study. I believe that the research process provided the participants with the means to reflect on their personal stories of strength and courage.

#### 5.4 Limitations of the Study & Directions for Future Research

There are limitations to the present research study, as there are in any research study. First, this study utilized a qualitative research methodology because it sought to reveal the lived experiences of the participants. For example, certain decisions regarding my research methods were made in relation to the chosen methodology and corresponding ontological and epistemological assumptions. For example, the way I presented my interview questions to the participants and how I introduced the constructs of physical activity and resilience could be questioned. I could have made things more structured and standardized by providing the participants with the definitions from the literature regarding physical activity and resilience during the interviews; however, I chose to keep things more open ended to align with my qualitative methodology. I was most curious about *their* definitions and ideas surrounding the constructs being investigated. Although this study provided in depth experiences of a specific homogenous sample, the findings are not generalizable to the general population because of the restricted sample size. In defense, generalizability was not goal of my research. Similarly, this study *only* explored the experiences of young women who thought *physical activity* helped them manage adversity. The experiences they expressed were positive for the most part; however, I am



aware that physical activity is not *always* a positive experience for people, especially young women and adolescent females (see Gibbons & Humbert, 2008). Therefore, once more the results of this study will not be generalizable to all young women. For example, the perspectives of inactive females would certainly be interesting and valuable information in resilience research. Resilience can be experienced in different ways and obtained through various means (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009); therefore, it would be advantageous for future studies to explore how adolescent females experience other activities such as art, music, writing, or various hobbies as a means to manage the adversity in their lives. As many adolescent females do not necessarily have positive experiences with physical activity, future research into other mechanisms for managing adversity would be a practical and meaningful area to address.

The qualitative approach that I utilized did not include any measures of physical activity or resilience as a part of the data collection, which would have been a primary component if I framed my research from a quantitative lens. Including measures of physical activity may have facilitated triangulation of the data. The generalizability of the results could be questioned for this reason; however, generalizability was not a goal of my research. The lived accounts and individual perspectives of the participants were my primary concern. Prioritizing the participants lived experiences reinforced my choice in methodology and the methods I chose to answer my original research question. As quantitative research tends to try to explain associations between events and focuses on *what happened*, it was not a well suited methodology to address my research concerns; I was most interested in the thoughts, emotions, and meanings of the topic so I could learn how the participants *made sense* of what happened (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). My approach to research did not leave any room for standardized scales or measures. Perhaps in the future, a mixed method design and a larger sample size could enhance the

generalizability of a similar study. Nevertheless, I feel more qualitative research is necessary to capture the essence of the experiences young women share with the constructs of resilience and physical activity.

There is still a strong need for current research surrounding resilience and physical activity, specifically from a qualitative framework. After becoming immersed in the literature, I believe that the current study is unique to the field of resilience research because it presents the *experiences* of young women with regards to how physical activity helped them manage adversity. The majority of the literature I encountered demonstrated the benefits of physical activity from a quantitative approach that was not gender specific. As gender is a social construction that affects both men's and women's experiences with physical activity and sport (see Messner & Sabo, 1990), I feel it would be beneficial to explore understandings of how physical activity helps different genders manage adversity throughout adolescence. For example, it would be logical to recommend a counterpart to the current study illuminating the male perspectives on the topics raised during the interviews. Prospective studies should also explore the relevance of socioeconomic status and ethnicity in their investigations of resilience, as these are issues that relate to constructivism and how the world is perceived. These characteristics were beyond the scope of the current study.

Lastly, there are a few logistical aspects of the current study that could be altered to gain further insight into specific populations. The current study included females who participated at a competitive level in sport, ranging from local to national categories. Future research could explore how physical activity is experienced with regards to managing adversity at different levels such as recreational, provincial, national, or international. In addition, the young women in the current study competed in a variety of different sports including individual and team sports as

well as physical activity without a competitive component. Future research could address these elements by exploring specific populations such as individuals who participate in the same sport, physical activity or specialized program. Furthermore, the current study included stories of various internal and external adversities. Perhaps future research could address specific adversities (i.e. divorce, discrimination, poverty, etc.) with case studies or other qualitative methods to determine how physical activity was experienced in those unique contexts. Also, the current study explored retrospective experiences of young adult women reflecting on their time in adolescence. This method of participant selection was chosen because it seemed logical and I had found similar approaches in qualitative resilience literature (see Burgess, 2003; Kinsel, 2005; Shepherd, Reynolds, & Moran, 2010). I rationalized that this population would have deeper insights into their resilience from their standpoints as young adults as opposed to individuals in the midst of adversity, including the challenges associated with the developmental phase of adolescence. It could be argued that there would be benefits to investigating resilience as it unfolds in adolescence. Perhaps the accuracy of the accounts with adversity would be stronger if the experiences were more recent in the participants' memories. When I decided to interview young adults, I determined that it would be more ethical as a novice researcher to work with less vulnerable populations than youth currently experiencing adversity in their lives. Although this choice in methods could be perceived as a potential limitation to the current study, I believe that exploring retrospectives was best suited to my skills as a researcher and the nature of my research question.

### 5.5 Advice to Adolescent Females Experiencing Adversity

As the interviews progressed, it occurred to me that it would be beneficial to ask the participants what words of advice they would give other adolescent females experiencing

adversity. I thought of this idea after both interviews with Rochelle and Jennifer; therefore, I was only able to ask Carly and Terra about what they would say to other adolescent females experiencing adversity. This advice may be beneficial to parents, educators, or counsellors working with adolescent females experiencing adversity.

Carly expressed the importance of adolescent females finding activities they are passionate about to serve as an outlet for the adversity they are experiencing. If she were to advise other female adolescents in situations similar to hers, she would tell them to "find something that you love to do... I think sports... or physical activity in any way is essential because you do need to work things through... find an outlet... find a way to showcase your strengths and weaknesses... ride out the roller coaster." Further, she explained how beneficial the relationships and mentors developed through physical activity are for adolescent females experiencing adversity. "The role models that come with physical activity... there's always somebody doing something great... and there is so many positives.... Physical activity has helped lots of people through a lot of things... I think [adolescent females] just need to find that outlet."

Terra discussed how important it is for adolescent females to discover their potential and what they are capable of through physical activity:

If you have a goal and you want it bad enough, you just gotta keep going, you just gotta push through because you can find that success if you are resilient and if you keep going... the feeling of putting everything into it and leaving it all out on the field is just as good of feeling as maybe making that team or winning that gold medal.

Terra also explained how important it is for adolescent females to stay positive, solution focused, and goal oriented when they are experiencing adversity. "If you really want something bad enough, that adversity or that time in your life that's really tough... as much pain as you're

feeling... you can feel just as much happiness and excitement and pride if you get past it." This advice was inspiring and reinforced the underlying reasons I pursued this research. I wanted to learn about the perspectives of young women who faced adversity in adolescence and determine what it is about physical activity that fosters resilience in this population. It is important for professionals to encourage young women to find physical activities that they enjoy are passionate about. Ultimately, it is essential for adolescent females to feel successful in the activities they participate in. Once they find an activity they connect with, they may be able to channel and harness their reactions to adversity and express themselves in positive and fulfilling manners.

#### 5.6 Implications for Professionals

The results of the present study may be useful for professionals who work directly (counsellors, teachers, coaches) or indirectly (agencies, organizations) with adolescent females who have encountered or are currently experiencing adversity. The present study contributed to the literature regarding experiences of resilience and the role of physical activity for adolescent females who have undergone adversity. After thoroughly investigating the available literature in the areas of resilience and physical activity as well as discussing my research questions with the young women who volunteered for this study, it became clear that the relationship between those two constructs is a valuable and worthy area of exploration. Specifically, the preventative and protective nature of physical activity and how it fosters positive development were emphasized and reinforced through the literature as well as in the stories of the research participants in the current study. These understandings are important for professionals who work with adolescent females to become aware of. Insights provided through this study and existing literature will aid professionals as they support adolescent females, particularly if they are working with them

through the medium of physical activity. The findings in the current study elucidate how physical activity is a viable option in addition to other supports such as counselling and other therapies for adolescent females who are coping with adversity.

There were specific ideas conveyed through the stories that participants shared about their experiences being physically active females. First, it is important that the environment adolescent females participate in be safe, welcoming, and supportive. Secondly, it was expressed that adolescent females be given opportunities for both challenge and success. This can be done through teachers and coaches ensuring that they differentiate their lessons and instruction to meet the needs of the individuals they are working with. Lastly, the participants expressed the need for positive young female role models in their sport. It was important to the young women in this study that the role models have realistic body types and that they be at an age where the girls they coach could feel a connection to them.

On a final note, I feel strongly that preventative approaches that build on physical, psychological, social, and intellectual strengths should be utilized frequently to reach adolescents who may be at risk for developing negative life outcomes. Specifically, I think it is important for professionals and other concerned individuals to consider where they would rather focus initiatives when it comes to disciplining those who have already made poor choices or investing in prevention and protection. I found an axiom in my readings that depicted this philosophy from a section of Joseph Malin's (1936) poem, *A Fence or an Ambulance*:

...Better guide well the young  
than reclaim them when they are old,  
For the voice of true wisdom is calling,  
"To rescue the fallen is good, but 'tis best

To prevent other people from falling."

Better close up the source of

temptation and crime

Than deliver from dungeon or galley;

Better put a strong fence 'round

the top of the cliff

Than an ambulance down in the valley. (pp. 273-264)

Malin's fence provides a metaphor for resiliency and hope for those facing uncertainty in their futures (Martinek & Hellison, 1997). The findings of this study and other research (see Collingwood, 1997; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2007; Petitpas, Cornelius, Raalte, & Jones, 2005; Martinek & Hellison, 1997) support that physical activity benefits adolescent females greatly because it allows them to develop themselves in physical, intellectual, social, and psychological areas.

## 5.7 Conclusion

This research has contributed to the literature by providing four young women's perspectives of their experiences with resilience and physical activity during adolescence. Current literature has fallen short regarding the lived experiences of resilience in relation to physical activity among young women specifically. The major contribution of this study to the literature was the elucidation of the processes adolescent females undergo as they navigate through adversity and how physical activity aided them along this journey.

The terminology in the resilience literature was sometimes difficult to conceptualize. Specifically, I did not know if I supported referring to adolescents as "at risk," a term used frequently when determining whether individuals are resilient. I felt like it was ambiguous and

perhaps offensive to label someone else as "at risk." The individuals in the present study generally did not agree with being labeled that way despite the fact that they all experienced circumstances collectively deemed as adverse in society. I think it could be inappropriate to compare or rate adversities that individuals encounter. To me, it is their perspective that is the most valuable and what that experience meant to them. I have learned through reading articles and books as well as listening to the stories of the four young women in my study that resilience and risk are dynamic and altering depending on peoples' perspectives. I believe that it is beneficial and therapeutic to focus on individuals' strengths and their personal journeys towards health and wellbeing. This study demonstrated that physical activity provided the young women I interviewed with many tools to help them manage adversity and develop positively.



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## 7.1 Appendix A: Interview Guide

### **‘It’s more than a game’: Young women’s retrospective experiences with physical activity as a means for resilience throughout adolescence**

#### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

The following interview guide will assist the researcher in generating data that is consistent among the research participants. However, this is a guide and the researcher will probe further and ask alternative questions as deemed appropriate during the context of each individual interview.

##### ***Physical Activity***

What is physical activity? Tell me about your experience with physical activity through adolescence. How were you physically active in adolescence? What kinds of sports or activities have you participated in? What age did you start? At what level did you participate at (recreational/provincial/national)? How often did you participate? What is the meaning of physical activity to you?

How was it for you being a female adolescent in \_\_\_\_\_ activity/sport? What did physical activity mean to you as an adolescent female? What barriers (if any) did you experience in accessing physical activity? What allowed you to be physically active?

What role did physical activity play in your life in terms of positive youth development or allowing you to develop positively? How has it impacted your life physically... emotionally... socially... intellectually in positive ways?

Based on your experiences, what changes or improvements ought to be made to physical activity programs to foster positive development in youth? What characteristics are necessary to promote positive development in adolescent females specifically?

##### ***Adversity & Resilience***

When responding to this research study, part of the study requirements was to have encountered some type of adversity in your life. What types of adversity or significant life challenges have you experienced in adolescence? What was adolescence like for you? How do you remember feeling in adolescence?

Based on your experience, what things happened in your life that allowed you to develop positively despite growing up with adversity?

What do the terms “at risk” and “resilience” mean to you? From your experience, was physical activity as a means for resilience? Why and why not? How do you think physical activity can help at risk youth?

### ***Physical Activity and Resilience***

Guide me through a negative experience you faced in adolescence in as much detail as possible. How did you use physical activity to cope with this experience? What meaning has your experience with physical activity had for you in relation to your negative experience in adolescence? Do you believe that physical activity or sport teaches young people to “bounce back” from difficult circumstances? How so?

Tell me about your coach(es) and your relationship with him or her? Other adult positive role models? Tell me about your relationships with your peers in physical activity settings?

How has being involved in physical activity influenced your values and beliefs as well as your directions in life? How do you feel about yourself and future at this moment in time? Would things have been different if physical activity had not been such an important aspect of your life? What is unique about physical activity as a means to promote resilience in adolescents?

### ***Summarizing and Main Research Questions***

How was physical activity experienced in adolescence and what meanings are associated with this behavior?

How has physical activity contributed to your abilities to develop positively?

What does resilience mean to you? How did you navigate and negotiate the adversity you experienced in adolescence?

What role has physical activity played in your experiences navigating and negotiating life challenges and adversity adolescence? Specifically, what aspects of physical activity have contributed to your resilience?

## 7.2 Appendix B: Confidentiality Agreement with Research Assistant(s)

### **‘It’s more than a game’: Young women’s retrospective experiences with physical activity as a means for resilience throughout adolescence**

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**

Teresa Hill  
M. Ed. Candidate  
B. Ed. & B. Sc. Kin  
Dep’t of Edu Psy & Special Ed.  
University of Saskatchewan  
Phone: 974-5522

Dr. Tim Claypool  
Registered Doctoral Psychologist  
Assistant Professor  
Dep’t of Edu Psy & Special Ed.  
University of Saskatchewan  
Phone: 966- 8861

#### **Purpose of the Study**

Physical activity may play an important role in how young women have managed challenging circumstances and adversity in their lives. The purpose of this study is to grasp the experience and meaning of physical activity for adolescent females and how it has impacted their ability to be resilient. Specifically, this research will explore a) how physical activity is experienced as a means for resilience and b) defining characteristics and meaning of that experience.

#### **Agreement to Confidentiality**

As an assistant researcher in this study, you will have access to personal information about the research participants. This information will be gained through listening to audiotapes, transcribing data, and discussions with the researcher(s). By signing this form, you are agreeing to hold all information confidential.

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(Name of Research Assistant)

---

(Date)

---

(Signature of Research Assistant)

---

(Signature of Researcher)

## Research Participants Wanted

This research study aims to explore young women's understandings of physical activity in relationship to their experiences with overcoming hardships during adolescence. The knowledge gained from this study will illustrate young women's relationships with physical activity and possibly help develop athletic programming for adolescent females and or disadvantaged youth. The title of this study is: **'It's more than a game': Young women's retrospective experiences with physical activity as a means for resilience throughout adolescence.**

Please consider participating in this research study if you:

- *Are female and between the ages of 18 and 25*
- *See yourself as being "physically active" in adolescence*
- *Participated in at least one physical activity regularly in adolescence. Physical activities include anything that makes you sweat or breath hard (i.e. sports, dance, yoga, biking, martial arts, exercise training, etc.)*
- *Believe physical activity was a meaningful method for managing adversity or uncontrollable and difficult life circumstances during adolescence*
- *Consider yourself "resilient"*
- *Are willing to participate in an initial one on one interview and a follow conversation about the research collected (approximately 2hrs total)*

If selected for this research study, you will receive a \$30 gift card for Lululemon to show appreciation for your time and knowledge. Please contact Teresa Hill if you are interested in participating. She will provide you with more information about the study and what will be required of you.

Teresa Hill Supervisor: Tim Claypool (Office #: ED 3100) (306) 270-3872 Tah141@mail.usask.ca	Teresa Hill Supervisor: Tim Claypool (Office #: ED 3100) (306) 270-3872 Tah141@mail.usask.ca	Teresa Hill Supervisor: Tim Claypool (Office #: ED 3100) (306) 270-3872 Tah141@mail.usask.ca	Teresa Hill Supervisor: Tim Claypool (Office #: ED 3100) (306) 270-3872 Tah141@mail.usask.ca	Teresa Hill Supervisor: Tim Claypool (Office #: ED 3100) (306) 270-3872 Tah141@mail.usask.ca	Teresa Hill Supervisor: Tim Claypool (Office #: ED 3100) (306) 270-3872 Tah141@mail.usask.ca
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## 7.4 Appendix D: Consent Form

### **‘It’s more than a game’: Young women’s retrospective experiences with physical activity as a means for resilience throughout adolescence**

#### **CONSENT FORM**

Teresa Hill  
M. Ed. Candidate  
B. Ed. & B. Sc. Kin  
Dep’t of Edu Psy & Special Ed.  
University of Saskatchewan  
Phone: 974-5522  
Email: tah141@mail.usask.ca

Dr. Tim Claypool  
Registered Doctoral Psychologist  
Assistant Professor  
Dep’t of Edu Psy & Special Ed.  
University of Saskatchewan  
Phone: 966- 8861  
Email: tim.claypool@usask.ca

#### **Purpose and Procedure**

You are invited to take part in a research study entitled: *‘It’s more than a game’: Young women’s retrospective experiences with physical activity as a means for resilience throughout adolescence*. Physical activity may play an important role in how young women have managed challenging circumstances and adversity in their lives. The purpose of this study is to grasp the experience and meaning of physical activity for adolescent females and how it has impacted their ability to be resilient. Specifically, this research will explore a) how physical activity is experienced as a means for resilience and b) defining characteristics and meaning of that experience.

#### **Funding**

This study is funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Master’s Joseph- Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship awarded to Teresa Hill.

#### **Participation**

For this study, we are looking for females between the ages of 18 and 25 who feel that physical activity has allowed them to manage adversity in their life and therefore be resilient. Interested individuals will participate in one audiotaped, semi-structured interview that will last approximately one hour in duration. After the researcher has transcribed the data, participants will have the opportunity to go over the transcripts. At this point, they can withdraw any comments they wish to not be included in the data. The researcher will then have a follow up



conversation about the data with the research participants that will last up to one hour. The researcher will then ask for the participants' consent to use their data in the study.

### **Potential Benefits**

There are no explicit benefits that can be attributed to participating in this study. However, there is a possibility that some participants may develop a deeper understanding of the role physical activity has played in their lives and have an opportunity to reflect on this experience. In addition, participants will be contributing to greater knowledge and insight into the experiences of young women with physical activity.

### **Potential Risks**

There are no known or anticipated physical or psychological risks associated with this study. You have the right to refuse any question and to withdraw from the study at any time. This will result in no penalty to you or anyone else. In the event that you would like to further discuss your feelings regarding topics discussed in the study, Saskatoon Mental Health Services can assist you. These services are available to the public for free and the contact number is: 306-655- 7950.

### **Storage of the Data**

All research data and material will be stored securely in the Dr. Tim Claypool's office at the University of Saskatchewan. Only researchers and the research assistant(s) will have access to the data, all of which have signed confidentiality agreements to protect its contents. The data will be stored for a minimum of five years after the study is completed. This is standard protocol for any data that may be published in an academic journal and/or presented at a professional conference. At this point the data will be shredded and files will be deleted.

### **Confidentiality**

The data from this study will be used as a part of the student researcher's thesis and possibly to produce a manuscript to be published in a journal and/or at a conference. However, your identity will be kept confidential. Although direct quotations from the interviews may be reported, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym (made up name) and all identifying information (i.e. name, school, address, etc.) will be removed from the report. Only the research team will review the original audiotapes and transcripts. Identifying information will not be discussed outside the research team. A code number will identify audiotapes and they will be kept in a secure and locked place. The audiotapes and transcripts will be stored separately from the master sheet

including names, pseudonyms, and code numbers. The master sheet will be shredded after data collection has been completed because it will no longer be needed.

It is important to also note that there are certain information that the researchers are obligated to report to relevant authorities (i.e. child abuse, intent to harm self or others). Other than those limitations, there are no other circumstances where the researcher would not keep identifying information confidential.

### **Right to Withdraw**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to only answer questions you feel comfortable with. You also have the right to withdraw from the study without explanation until the data is pooled and analyzed with no penalties to you or anyone else. If you choose to withdraw, all data you contributed will be destroyed.

### **Questions**

Please feel free to contact the researcher should you have any questions or concerns at any time. In addition, questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the Ethics office toll free 1-888-966-2975 or [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca). You may contact the research team to find the results of the study or request a copy of the published manuscript.

### **Consent:**

I have read and understood the description provided. I consent to participate in this research project and am aware that I can withdraw at anytime. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

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(Name of Participant)

---

(Date)

---

(Signature of Participant)

---

(Signature of Researcher)

## 7.5 Appendix E: Initial Transcript Release Form

### **‘It’s more than a game’: Young women’s retrospective experiences with physical activity as a means for resilience throughout adolescence**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Teresa Hill. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Teresa Hill to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

## 7.6 Appendix F: Revised Transcript Release Form

### **‘It’s more than a game’: Young women’s retrospective experiences with physical activity as a means for resilience throughout adolescence**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have completed two interviews with Teresa Hill. I have been given transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Teresa Hill. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Teresa Hill to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

## 7.7 Appendix G: Ethics Application



### Application for Behavioural Research Ethics Review

#### *Evaluating Applications*

The matters of greatest concern to the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) are the issues of informed consent of participants, voluntary participation, protection of individual privacy (confidentiality and anonymity), and safeguarding participants from any harmful results due to participation or non-participation in the proposed investigation or research project. Our evaluation of an application is based on the degree to which each of these concerns are satisfied; when filling out the application, researchers are urged to consider these points, and to explain to the Beh-REB the steps they will take to address the concerns. Researchers are also urged to consult the [Tri-Council Policy Statement 2](#) for more information and guidance.

The Beh-REB acknowledges the variety of paradigms and methodologies currently available to researchers, and that each of these paradigms entails its own particular ethical issues. Thus, there may be more than one way to address an ethical issue. Researchers should feel free to suggest alternative approaches or to explain why a particular requirement is not appropriate in the context of a given project.

**\*\*All text boxes will expand once <Enter> is selected or the cursor moves to the next section.\*\***

PART 1: IDENTIFICATION	
1.1	<b>Project Title</b> <a href="#">GN 1.1</a> "It's more than a game": Young women's retrospective experiences with physical activity as a means for resilience throughout adolescence
1.2	<b>Principal Investigator</b> <a href="#">GN 1.2</a> Full Name: Teresa Hill Mailing Address: 309 311 Tait Crescent Saskatoon SK S7H5L6 Email: tah141@mail.usask.ca Phone: (306)974-2255 NSID number (U of S faculty only):
1.3	<b>University/Institutional Affiliation of Principal Investigator</b> <a href="#">GN 1.3</a> Position: Graduate Student Department: Educational Psychology and Special Education Division:
1.4	If this is a student/graduate/resident project, please provide the following information: <a href="#">GN 1.4</a> a) Student Name(s) and Student ID or NSID (s): Teresa Hill (10470243) b) Supervisor Name: Tim Claypool
1.5	<b>Project Personnel (include graduates/post graduates/residents):</b> <a href="#">GN 1.5</a> <div style="float: right;"> <input type="button" value="Add Personnel"/> <input type="button" value="Remove Last"/> </div> Full Name: <input type="text"/> Project Position/Role: <input type="text"/> University/Institutional Affiliation: <input type="text"/> Email: <input type="text"/> Phone: <input type="text"/>
1.6	<b>Primary Contact Person for Correspondence (if different than Section 1.2)</b> <a href="#">GN 1.6</a> Full Name: <input type="text"/> Mailing Address: <input type="text"/> Email: <input type="text"/> Phone: <input type="text"/>

1.7	Research Site(s) where project will be carried out:	Interviews will be conducted at the University of Saskatchewan in the College of Education in one of the private meeting rooms.
1.8	1.8.1 Proposed Project Period: <a href="#">GN 1.8</a> From (MM/DD/YY)	04/01/2013 To (MM/DD/YY) 04/01/2014
1.9	1.9.1 Has this project applied for and/or received ethical approval from any other Research Ethics Board? Will you be seeking REB approval through the Sask. ethics harmonization process? <a href="#">GN 1.9</a>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
1.9	1.9.2 Please be advised that approvals may need to be sought if you are collecting data from schools, within health regions and may be required from other organizations, agencies, or community groups. Will you be contacting potential participants or collecting data from any such organizations? <a href="#">GN 1.9.2</a>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
1.10	1.10.1 Status of Funds: <a href="#">GN 1.10</a>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Awarded <input type="checkbox"/> Pending <input type="checkbox"/> Unfunded
1.10	1.10.2 Provide name of funding source:	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
1.10	1.10.3 Source of Funds:	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry <input type="checkbox"/> National Institute of Health (NIH) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tri-Council Grant <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative Group (NCIC, COG, RTOG) <input type="checkbox"/> Not-for-Profit Foundation <input type="checkbox"/> Internally funded
11.1	Name of Sponsor if different from above funding source:	

## PART 2: CONFLICT OF INTEREST

2.1	2.1.1 Is there any real, potential or perceived conflict of interest (any personal or financial interest in the conduct or outcome of this project)? <a href="#">GN 2.1</a>	No
2.1	2.1.2 Will any of the researcher(s), members of the research team and/or their immediate family members:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Receive personal benefits in connection with this project over and above the direct costs of conducting the project, such as remuneration or employment?</li> <li>- Receive significant payments of other sorts from the sponsor such as grants, compensation in the form of equipment or supplies or retainers for ongoing consultation and honoraria?</li> <li>- Have a non-financial relationship with a sponsor (such as unpaid consultant, board membership, advisor or other non-financial interest)?</li> <li>- Have any direct involvement with the sponsor such as stock ownership, stock options or board membership.</li> <li>- Hold patents, trademarks, copyrights, licensing agreements or intellectual property rights linked in any way to this project or the sponsor?</li> <li>- Have any other relationship, financial or non-financial, that if not disclosed, could be construed as a conflict of interest?</li> </ul> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

## PART 3: BRIEF OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PROJECT

3.1	<p>Briefly describe the project, its objectives and potential significance (250-500 words): <a href="#">GN 3.1</a></p> <p>The purpose of this study is to explore the experience and meaning of physical activity for adolescent females and how it has impacted their ability to be resilient. Specifically, this research will explore a) how physical activity is experienced as a means for resilience and b) the defining characteristics of the experience. The main research goal is to determine the role of physical activity in young women's experiences navigating and negotiating the adversities they experienced in adolescence.</p> <p>In this qualitative research study, young women between the ages of 18 and 25 will be asked to think back about their adolescence and discuss the impact of physical activity in relation to their current place in life and perception of their resilience. The central research question is: what is the role of physical activity in young women's experience building resilience in adolescence? Other important questions to be explored in the proposed research study include:</p> <p>1) What does resilience mean to young women? How did they navigate and negotiate the adversity they experienced in adolescence?</p> <p>2) What was the meaning of physical activity in adolescence for young women? How was physical activity experienced? What</p>
-----	---

	<p>Is the accessibility to physical activity like for adolescent females and how could it be improved?</p> <p>3) How does physical activity contribute to positive youth development in adolescent females? What aspects of physical activity contribute to building resilience in adolescent females?</p> <p>The results of the proposed research study will add to the body of research identifying the benefits of physical activity with a specific focus on how it contributes to resilience during adolescence. Understanding the lived experiences of adolescent females who believe physical activity has helped them be resilient will provide parents, teachers, counselors, and other professionals with knowledge to empathize with this population and develop effective interventions to meet their needs. In addition, other youth may relate to these lived experiences and feel inspired to be more active. Conclusions from the proposed research will add to the growing body of research regarding strength-based and preventative approaches for helping female adolescents who may be at risk for negative life outcomes.</p>												
3.2	<p>Provide a description of research design and methods to be used: <a href="#">GN 3.2</a></p> <p>The design for the proposed research study follows a qualitative research methodology. This is appropriate because it is the experiences of young women and the meanings they associate with physical activity that are to be explored. The proposed study falls within a constructivist paradigm, meaning that it is assumed that the research participants have created meanings in their experiences and that these experiences can only be explored through the participant's perspectives.</p> <p>The specific branch of qualitative research to be used is Jonathan Smith's Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is concerned with exploring individuals' lived experiences in their own terms. The method of data collection to be used are in depth, semi-structured interviews. Initial open ended questions have been created as a guide; however, the semi-structured format of the interview allows the researcher to modify and probe further as interesting ideas in the conversation emerge. The researcher will use the method of 'tunneling,' where broad questions are asked initially following by more narrow questions that probe specific issues. Before the researcher conducts interviews with research participants, the researcher will conduct a pilot study. In the pilot study, the researcher will practice interview questions with classmates or friends to determine if changes in minor format or wording need to be made so that in depth personal experiences can be provided.</p>												
3.3	<p>Provide details regarding the duration and location of data collection event(s): <a href="#">GN 3.3</a></p> <p>Data will be collected at the University of Saskatchewan in the College of Education in one of the private meeting rooms on a mutually agreed upon date. The initial interview will take approximately one hour. The follow up conversation about emerging themes in from the initial interview will take up to an additional hour with the research participants in the same location on a separate, mutually agreed upon date.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Participant Observation</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Individual Interviews</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Focus Groups</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Group Interview</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Non-invasive physical measurements</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Video/audio recording</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Secondary use of data or analysis of existing data</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Home Visits</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> Ethnography</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2"><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: Follow up conversation</td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire	<input type="checkbox"/> Participant Observation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Individual Interviews	<input type="checkbox"/> Focus Groups	<input type="checkbox"/> Group Interview	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-invasive physical measurements	<input type="checkbox"/> Video/audio recording	<input type="checkbox"/> Secondary use of data or analysis of existing data	<input type="checkbox"/> Home Visits	<input type="checkbox"/> Ethnography	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: Follow up conversation	
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: Follow up conversation													

PART 4: PROJECT DETAILS	
4.1	<p>4.1.1 Will you have any internet-based interaction with participants? <a href="#">GN 4.1</a></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
4.2	<p>4.2.1 Will your research involve Aboriginal Peoples including First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples? <a href="#">GN 4.2</a></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
4.3	<p>4.3.1 Will the project involve community-based participatory research? <a href="#">GN 4.3</a></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
4.4	<p>Will deception of any kind be necessary in this project? <a href="#">GN 4.4</a></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
4.5	<p>Indicate how the participants will be debriefed following their participation (if applicable), and describe how the information on the results of the research will be made available to participants once the study has ended. Debriefing is particularly important if deception has been used. <a href="#">GN 4.5</a></p> <p>It is not anticipated that participants will be stressed or upset as a result of participating in this study. Participants will be notified during informed consent that they have the right to refuse any question or withdraw from the study at any time until they have released their transcripts to be used in the study and the data has been collated. In the event that participants would like to further discuss their feelings regarding the topics discussed in the study, the researcher will refer them to Saskatoon Mental Health Services, which is available to the public free of charge (306-655-7950). A final copy of the research study will be</p>

	provided to the participants via email, if requested, once the thesis has been defended and a final document has been submitted to the University of Saskatchewan.
4.6	<p>Will participants be compensated? <a href="#">GN 4.6</a></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Please include details: Participants will be provided with a \$30 gift card to Lululemon as a token of the researcher's appreciation. This will be given to them during the follow up conversation about the emerging themes from the initial interview.</p>
4.7	<p>4.7.1 Will participants be anonymous in the data gathering phase of the study? (Anonymous means that no link can be established between the participant and the research - no one including the researcher knows who has participated in the research):</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>4.7.2 Will the confidentiality of participants and their data be protected? (Confidentiality means that no link can be established between the collected information and the participant's identity)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>4.7.3 If yes, are there any limits to confidentiality:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Limits due to the nature of group activities (e.g. focus groups): the researcher cannot guarantee confidentiality</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Limits due to context: individual participants could be identified because of the nature or size of the sample or because of their relationship with the researcher.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Limits due to selection: procedures for recruiting or selecting participants may compromise the confidentiality of participants (e.g. participants are referred to the study by a person outside the research team)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</p>

PART 5: ESTIMATION OF RISKS AND BENEFITS	
5.1	<p>5.1.1 Do you consider this project to be: <a href="#">GN 5.1</a></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Minimal Risk <input type="checkbox"/> Above Minimal Risk</p> <p>5.1.2 Indicate if the participants might experience any of the following:</p> <p>Risk of psychological or emotional harm or discomfort (e.g. trauma, anxiety, stress) It is not anticipated that participants will be subjected to psychological harm as a result of participating in the study. However, talking about perceived sensitive issues may cause emotional discomfort.</p> <p>Legal repercussions for participating in the study (e.g. possibility of being sued, charged with criminal activity, disclosure of past or future criminal activities, etc.) N/A</p> <p>Social repercussions (e.g. ostracized, being negatively judged by peers or employer, fired from your job) N/A</p> <p>Risk of physical harm or discomfort (e.g. falling, muscle pain, tiredness, weakness, nausea) N/A</p> <p>5.1.3 Describe how the risk will be managed (including an explanation as to why an alternative approach could not be used). If appropriate, identify any resources, e.g. physician or counselor, to which participants can be referred. <a href="#">GN 5.1.3</a> Potential emotional risk will be managed by the researcher being sensitive to how the participant is reacting to the interview process and ensuring they understand they do not need to discuss things they do not feel comfortable with. The researcher will also provide participants with the contact information of mental health services in the consent form and during debriefing. Alternative methods could not be used because the chosen methods are most suitable to uncovering the participants' authentic experiences.</p> <p>5.1.4 If above minimal risk, what are the likely benefits of the research to the researcher, participant, the research community and society that would justify asking participants to participate? <a href="#">GN 5.1.4</a> Not Applicable</p>

PART 6: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT
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6.1	<p>Describe the participants and the criteria for their inclusion or exclusion. Indicate the number of participants and a brief rationale for the intended number of participants: <a href="#">GN 6.1</a></p> <p>Participants for the proposed research study will meet the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Female between the ages of 18 and 25</li> <li>- Define selves as physically active throughout adolescence</li> <li>- Participated in at least one physical activity on a regular basis throughout adolescence. Physical activities include anything makes one sweat or breathe hard.</li> <li>- Believe physical activity was a meaningful method for managing adversity or difficult life circumstances during adolescence</li> <li>- Consider self "resilient"</li> <li>- Be willing to participate in an one on one interview (1hr length), member checking, and a follow up conversation about the data (approximately 2hrs total)</li> <li>- Able to understand their involvement in the research process, give consent, engage with the interviewer, and be willing to express their experiences and opinions</li> </ul> <p>The proposed research study will include 5 or 6 participants. This is a reasonable sample size for a phenomenological research study because it provides enough cases to examine similarities and differences between participants without producing an overwhelming amount of data.</p>
6.2	<p>6.2.1 Provide a detailed description of the method of recruitment. <a href="#">GN 6.2</a></p> <p>A purposeful sampling procedure, followed by snowball sampling will be used to recruit participants. The researcher intends to advertise at local organizations and community centers in Saskatchewan where physical activity has been promoted in youth and adults (i.e. Saskatoon Field House, YWCA). Advertisements will also be put in places that are likely to have high populations of young adults such as campus settings. Once the researcher had acquired some participants that are suitable for the study, she will proceed to "snowball sampling" if necessary by seeking interviews with people suggested from the initial interviewee(s). The researcher will do this by giving initial participants a few information packages about the study and asking them to distribute these to people they feel may be interested and meet the selection criteria. This method is appropriate because the participants to be recruited need to be specific types of people with unique characteristics in order for the data gathered to be meaningful. As a part of informed consent, participants will understand that they are in no way obligated to assist the researcher with snowball sampling.</p> <p>6.2.2 How will prospective participants be identified?</p> <p>Prospective participants will email or phone the researcher. The researcher will go over the participant criteria with the prospective participants. If it is mutually agreed upon that they meet the criteria, the researcher and the participant will set up a meeting time for the interview.</p> <p>6.2.3 Who will contact prospective participants? Describe the source of the contact information, how they will be contacted and as applicable, who originally collected the contact information. Ensure any letters of initial contact or other recruitment materials are attached, e.g. advertisements, flyers, telephone script, etc.</p> <p>Participants not be contacted by the researcher. They will see an advertisement and contact the researcher via email or telephone. The researcher will strive to have a diverse range of individuals in the study. In the case of snowball sampling, research participants will be contacted via other participants. The participants recruited through snowball sampling will be given a letter describing the research and the contact information of the researcher. They will contact the researcher about the research.</p>
6.3	<p>In cases where the research involves special or vulnerable populations, distinct cultural groups, or in cases where the research is above minimal risk, the researcher should describe their experience or training in working with the population. If none of these criteria apply, this section may be omitted. <a href="#">GN 6.3</a></p> <p>Not Applicable</p>
6.4	<p>Where relevant, please explain any relationship (pre-existing, current or expected to have) between the researcher(s) and the researched (e.g. instructor-student, manager-employee, co-workers, family members/intimate relationships, etc). Please pay special attention to relationships in which there may be a power differential. Describe any safeguards and procedures to prevent possible undue influence, coercion or inducement. <a href="#">GN 6.4</a></p> <p>There are no expected dual relationships between the researcher and the research participants.</p>

## PART 7: CONSENT PROCESS

	<p>Describe the process that will be used to obtain informed consent. Please note that it is the content of the consent, not the format that is important. If the research involves collection of personally identifiable information from a research participant or extraction of personally identifiable information from an existing database, please describe how consent from the individuals or authorization from the data custodian will be obtained. If there will be no written consent, please provide a rationale for oral or implied consent (e.g., cultural appropriateness, online questionnaire, etc.) and explain how consent will be recorded.</p>
7.1	<p><b>7.1.1 Describe the consent process. GN 7.1</b>  The consent process will involve a conversation with the participant prior to them signing the consent form. The researcher will present the participant a form outlining what they are consenting to. The researcher will then go over the following areas with the participant as outlined in the form:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Purpose and Procedure</li> <li>- Funding</li> <li>- Participation</li> <li>- Potential Benefits</li> <li>- Potential Risks</li> <li>- Storage of the Data</li> <li>- Confidentiality</li> <li>- Right to Withdraw</li> <li>- Questions</li> <li>- Consent</li> </ul> <p>Please refer to the consent form for a description of these areas.</p> <p><b>7.1.2 Who will ask for consent?</b>  The researcher will ask for consent.</p> <p><b>7.1.3 Where, and under what circumstances will consent be obtained?</b>  Consent will be obtained prior to data collection. The researcher will meet with the participant in one of the private meeting rooms in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. She will then provide the participant with the consent form and verbally go over each section while encouraging the participant to query if they do not understand something. The researcher will answer any questions the participant has. Once the participant has signed the consent form and agreed to participate, the researcher will begin to collect the data.</p> <p><b>7.1.4 Describe any situation in which the renewal of consent for this research might be appropriate and how this would take place (e.g. longitudinal studies, multiple data collection events, etc.).</b>  There are no foreseeable situations where the consent form would need to be renewed.</p>
7.2	<p><b>If any or all of the participants are children and/or are not competent to consent, describe the process by which capacity/competency will be assessed, the proposed alternate source of consent - including any permission/ information letter to be provided to the person(s) providing the alternate consent - as well as the assent process for participants. GN 7.2</b>  Only adults and those competent to give their own consent will be selected to participate in the proposed research study.</p>
7.3	<p><b>Describe your plans for providing project results to the participant? GN 7.3</b>  Once the data has been transcribed, the researcher will email the participant a copy of the transcripts for member checking. At this point the participant will notify the researcher via email if changes need to be made (i.e. withdraw or alter responses). In the follow up conversation, the researcher will notify the participant of the themes she noticed in their transcripts. At this point the participant can alert the researcher if they feel misrepresented or agree with the conclusions the researcher has made. Then they will have one final chance to withdraw their data before signing the data release form provided by the researcher. Upon the request of the participant, the researcher will email the participant a copy of the final research study once it has been submitted to the University of Saskatchewan.</p>
7.4	<p><b>How and when are participants informed of the right to withdraw? What procedures will be followed for participants who wish to withdraw at any point during the study? GN 7.4</b>  Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participants have the right to only answer questions they feel comfortable with. They have the right to withdraw from the study without explanation or penalty until they sign the transcript release form or the data has been pooled and analyzed. If the participant chooses to withdraw, all data they contributed will be destroyed (i.e. deleted and/or shredded).</p>

## PART 8: DATA SECURITY AND STORAGE

Indicate the procedures you plan to implement to safeguard and store the data. Identify the person who will be assuming responsibility for data storage (University regulations require the researcher or the supervisor, in the case of student research, to securely store the data at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years upon the completion

of the study - ( <a href="#">Procedures for Stewardship of Research Records at the University of Saskatchewan 2010</a> .)	
8.1	<p><b>Who will conduct the data collection?</b> <a href="#">GN 8.1</a></p> <p>Teresa Hill, the researcher will conduct the data collection.</p>
8.2	<p><b>Who will have access to the original data of the study?</b> <a href="#">GN 8.2</a></p> <p>The researcher (Teresa Hill), her supervisor (Tim Claypool) will have access to the original data of the study. For the purposes of transcribing, the research assistant(s) will have temporary access to the original data. The researcher may discuss the data with the research assistant(s) and thesis supervisor to ensure she is allowing meaning to emerge from the data as opposed to imposing her own meaning on the data.</p>
8.3	<p><b>How will confidentiality of original data be maintained as well as preserving or destroying data after the research is completed. For all data (e.g. paper records, audio or visual recordings, electronic recordings), indicate the:</b> <a href="#">GN 8.3</a></p>
	<p><b>8.3.1 Person responsible for data storage:</b></p> <p>The researcher (Teresa Hill) will be responsible for the secure storage of the data, including audio recordings and transcripts until the data has been analysed and the thesis has been defended. At that point she will give all research data and material to her thesis supervisor (Tim Claypool), where he will store it securely in his office at the University of Saskatchewan.</p>
	<p><b>8.3.2 Data security during transportation from collection site:</b></p> <p>Data will be securely stored in a digital recording device that is password protected from the collection site to the researcher's home.</p>
	<p><b>8.3.3 Means and location of storage (e.g. a locked filing cabinet, password protected computer files, encryption):</b></p> <p>The researcher (Teresa Hill) will keep paper records (transcripts and researcher journal) locked in a secure room or cabinet. Audio and word files will be kept on the researcher's password protected computer that will be in her immediate possession or locked in a secure room. If a flash drive is used to store data, it will be password protected and or locked in a secure cabinet or room. No one but the researcher and thesis supervisor will have access to or be aware of where the data is stored.</p>
	<p><b>8.3.4 Time duration of storage (Must be &gt; 5 Years):</b></p> <p>The data will be stored for a minimum of five years after the study is completed.</p>
8.4	<p><b>8.3.5 Final disposition (archive, shredding, electronic file deletion):</b></p> <p>Data on paper (transcripts and researcher journal) will be shredded; electronic audio and word files will be deleted.</p>
	<p><b>Indicate how the data collected is intended to be used (thesis, journal articles, conference presentation, media, etc).</b> <a href="#">GN 8.4</a></p> <p>The data from this study will be used as a part of the student researcher's thesis and possibly to produce a manuscript to be published in a journal and/or at a conference.</p>

**PART 9: Declaration by Principal Investigator  
(or Supervisor for student projects)**

**Project Title**

'It's more than a game': Young women's retrospective experiences with physical activity as a means for resilience throughout adolescence

- I confirm that the information provided in this application is complete and correct.
- I accept responsibility for the ethical conduct of this project and for the protection of the rights and welfare of the human participants who are directly or indirectly involved in this project.
- I will comply with all policies and guidelines of the University and Health Region/affiliated institutions where this project will be conducted, as well as with all applicable federal and provincial laws regarding the protection of human participants in research.
- I will ensure that project personnel are qualified, appropriately trained and will adhere to the provisions of the REB-approved application.
- I certify that any significant changes to the project, including the proposed method, consent process or recruitment procedures, will be reported to the Research Ethics Board for consideration in advance of its implementation.
- I certify that a status report will be submitted to the Research Ethics Board for consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the project remains open, and upon project completion.
- If personal health information is requested, I assure that it is the minimum necessary to meet the research objective and will not be reused or disclosed to any parties other than those described in the REB-approved application, except as required by law.
- I confirm that adequate resources to protect participants (i.e., personnel, funding, time, equipment and space) are in place.
- I understand that if the contract or grant related to this research project is being reviewed by the University or Health Region, a copy of the ethics application inclusive of the consent document(s), may be forwarded to the person responsible for the review of the contract or grant.
- I understand that if the project involves Health Region resources or facilities, a copy of the ethics application may be forwarded to the Health Region research coordinator to facilitate operational approval.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator and/or Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Principal Investigator and/or Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (MM/DD/YY)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Student Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (MM/DD/YY)

**Department Head (UofS and RQHR only) :** The signature/approval of the Department/Administrative Unit acknowledges that he/she is aware of and supports the research activity described in the proposal.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Department Head

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Department Head

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (MM/DD/YY)

**SECTION 10: APPENDICES [\\_GN\\_10](#)**

Document	Included?	Description
Recruit Material(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Recruitment Poster Information Package for Snowball Sampling
Letter (s) of Initial Contact	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Information Package for Snowball Sampling
Consent Form(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Consent Form (distributed to participants at the one to one interview)
Assent Form(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	
Research Tool(s) (e.g. Questionnaires, focus group guides, interview scripts, etc.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Interview Guide
Transcript Release Form(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Transcript Release Form
RQHR Operational/Departmental Approval Form	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	
Other (please specify): Confidentiality Agreement	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Confidentiality Agreement to be signed by research assistant(s)